

Opening Doors for Youth Act

Senators Tim Kaine and Laphonza Butler

According to the most recent data, over [4.5 million](#) young people aged 16 to 24 were disconnected from both school and work. Disconnected youth – often referred to as “opportunity youth” – face significant barriers to success and are twice as likely to live below the federal poverty threshold and more likely than other youth to have a disability. Disconnection can leave young people without the entry-level work experience and post-secondary credentials they need to succeed in the workforce and with significantly less lifetime earnings than the typical worker. Disconnection also imposes significant costs on affected young people, their communities, and the overall economy.

Dedicated federal funding to support summer and year-long jobs for young people can help mitigate and prevent disconnection, as well as help train our future workforce and allow young people, their communities, and the economy to flourish. Studies have shown that summer youth employment programs can increase participant [earnings and employment](#), [reduce contact with the criminal justice system](#), and [improve a range of participants’ developmental outcomes](#). However, currently funded offerings only reach a small fraction of young people who might benefit from these programs. Through targeted resources and support services, including funding for summer and year-long jobs and comprehensive support services for youth, we can move closer as a country toward reconnecting the millions of young people who have slipped through the cracks and prevent disconnection from occurring in the first place.

The *Opening Doors for Youth Act* expands employment opportunities for our nation’s at-risk and disconnected youth by:

- Authorizing grants to help communities create dedicated summer job opportunities targeting in- and out-of-school youth ages 14 to 24 to ensure that young people are connected to meaningful work-based learning.
- Authorizing grants to help communities promote year-round employment opportunities targeting youth ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and work to ensure that these young adults can gain work experiences and work-readiness skills vital to long-term employment outcomes.
- Ensuring youth employment opportunities are of high quality by requiring programs to include:
 - Work-readiness and educational programs for youth to develop employability skills, like digital literacy programs;
 - Coaching and mentoring services for youth, such as resume development and networking;
 - Coaching and mentoring services for employers on successfully employing youth in meaningful work experiences;
 - Career exploration and college planning services;
 - Financial literacy education; and
 - Supportive services, such as mental health counseling.
- Establishing a community partnership grant program between local government and workforce boards, school districts, institutions of higher education, and support agencies for areas with high rates of disconnected youth that will provide comprehensive pathways for these young people to remain connected or reconnect to education and training programs as well as supportive services.

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