

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**January 15, 2010**

**Alarmed by Teen Unemployment Rates, coalition of advocates push for Youth Solutions Act**

(Boston, MA) Alarmed by the catastrophic unemployment rates of young adults across the state, a new coalition of supporters came together this week to advocate for the creation of a youth workforce development system. Convened by the MA Workforce Board Association and the Safe Teens/Safe Communities Coalition, a group of business leaders, economists, and young people took to the State House to promote their cause in front of the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.

Joe McLaughlin of the Center for Labor Market Studies illustrated the dire situation of youth by referencing figures from a new report, *The Deterioration in Teen Employment Rates in Massachusetts in Recent Years and the Case for the Youth Solutions Act*. One of the more jarring statistics was that the 2009 employment rate for teens has experienced a dramatic drop since 1999, with roughly 75,000 fewer teens working in an average month. McLaughlin pointed out that “when teens are not able to gain work experiences they have difficulty in their early twenties. And when they do secure employment their earnings capacity is diminished.”

Testimony addressed the current crisis young people face in Massachusetts. Don Gillis of the Massachusetts Workforce Board Association recommended that the Legislature establish a Youth Solutions Commission to help align the system, and that the Joint Committee communicate the impact of successful programs to other Legislators, both in Massachusetts and the nation’s Capitol. Gillis cited a 70% funding cut over the last three years to School-to-Career Connecting Activities, “Over the past decade these programs leveraged more than \$438 million in private sector wages, serving 200,000 plus in-school youth.”

Antonio Gutierrez, a Lynn Street Outreach worker spoke of the hardships youth face, often making wrong decisions for money, to help pay the rent. He argued that youth often can’t get back into school because of their past and can’t succeed in the workplace because they don’t have any skills. Of 875 kids that showed up at Lynn City Hall this summer looking for jobs, only 350 got them. “Now ¼ are in jail, ¼ cannot get back into school and the other half are working dead-end jobs.” Gutierrez reminded the Committee that the decisions they make trickle down to him on the street.

Gloria Williams from YouthBuild New Bedford spoke on the 2009 Summer Jobs program they were able to secure with the local Workforce Investment Board. Young people ages 18-24 worked to restore an Olmsted Park and wetland, planting new trees, identifying dead trees, gaining valuable landscaping experience. Williams also explained that the programs show youth that they can be part of the solution in their community.

Kathy Hamilton of the Boston PIC touted the effect the program had on dropout prevention. Hamilton referenced the recommendations in the recent report from the Massachusetts

Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission, which coincide with the dropout provisions in the Youth Solutions Act: targeted intervention to maximize expenditures by focusing on the students who are most likely to drop out; connecting school to college and career; active recovery and outreach; and, alternatives to traditional high school. Hamilton pointed out “The research has been done. The plan has been suggested. It’s just time to take the next step. In a very targeted way this bill does just that. It puts aside a small amount of funding to take some high leverage next steps.”

Several youth recounted their personal experiences including Tanya Sofia, 17, touted the GED program at the Crittenton Women’s Union, saying that the program has given her “a second chance at life.” And Dan Gelbtuch of the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, read testimony from a 17 year old student who attributed the Summer and Year Round Jobs Program to her becoming a “hardworking, accountable young lady.” Gelbtuch also talked about the issue of teens jobs being a public safety issue, “come summer they don’t want to feel like walking around is a danger to their lives, and they know that if there aren’t jobs their lives will literally be in more danger.”

Committee Co-Chair Cheryl Coakley-Rivera, State Representatives Sean Garballey and Paul McMurtry both thanked the youth for sharing their powerful stories with the Committee.

Stacy Gilmour of Quabbin Wire and the River East School-to-Career Partnership spoke about the program from a perspective of an employer. She commended the program for helping students become prepared for careers that will sustain them for a lifetime. Regarding the aging workforce in her company she believes the youth can be prepared to fill those positions in the next ten years; however, she noted that “we don’t need bodies. We need skills. We have seen so many dedicated professionals work for 15-20 years on building these activities and building this network. As an employer and someone who has been dedicated to this field, I can’t imagine that we would let that slip away. From an employer perspective, it would be a tragedy.”

“In a sense it is about growing our own. If you take the time to grow our own they will come back to us after school and work with us,” said Candace Burns Johnson from the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Through the Dana-Farber program in 2009, 100% of their interns went on to post-secondary school and 75% went on to pursue Healthcare. Ada Lei represented a success story, working at Liberty Mutual for two years through School-to-Career while attending Charlestown High School. She is now a guidance counselor at Charlestown High School and recommends many students to School-to-Career for the immense benefit it provides in helping youth interact with adults in a professional setting, gain interview skills, and gain skills through academic components.

Advocates plan to continue to push for the Youth Solution Act this legislative session and highlight the issue with the Legislature and on Capitol Hill. For more information or to get involved, visit [www.massworkforce.com/workforce-solutions-group.php](http://www.massworkforce.com/workforce-solutions-group.php)