



FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT WELFARE AGENCIES

Statement Prepared for the
New York City Council
General Welfare Committee & Community Development Committee
Public Hearing:

**Examining the Progress on the
Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO) Program
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My name is Jill Poklemba, and I am the Senior Policy Analyst for Income Security and Workforce Development at the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). FPWA is a membership organization with close to 300 member agencies and church-based human service programs that serve an estimated 1.5 million low-income New Yorkers in communities throughout the City. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the progress of the Center on Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiatives. In our testimony, we feature several CEO programs that have positive impacts on clients served by some of our FPWA member agencies in offering workforce development opportunities to low-income individuals. We strongly urge the City Council to continue funding for these programs and expand these programs to serve more in the future. These programs are “best practices” models that should be replicated to create more career opportunities for low-income youth and adults in New York City.

1. Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) – DYCD

YAIP is an excellent model that offers disconnected young adults ages 16-24 the opportunity to re-connect to the workforce and continuing education and training. The program gives youth participants an intensive short-term work readiness training followed by a paid internship to gain real work experience and learn valuable skills to advance in their career. Participants can earn up to \$2,500 in 14 weeks. In its first year of operation, the program has already shown positive results in linking youth to high quality job experiences and continuing educational opportunities upon completion. In addition, the program has revitalized some low-income communities as youth who graduate from the program serve as role models for their peers. In its first round, funding was provided to two of our FPWA member agencies: Henry St. Settlement and SCAN NY. These providers have forged new partnerships with local employers offering a diverse range of work experiences, including Clear Channel, Barrier Free Living, Mt. Sinai Hospital, and Sylvia’s Restaurant. Youth in these internships have the opportunity to learn hands on about many exciting

careers, such as video journalism, providing services to the elderly and people with disabilities, health care and nursing, and managing a family business. In addition, interns receive career guidance from an education advisor and job developer who works with them to develop a long-term career path. They also receive 9 months of aftercare services to maintain a connection to work and school and assistance in applying to college if that is their goal. They can also receive help with conducting a job search after the internship period is over. Youth can participate in social group activities, which increased their motivation and fostered stronger bonds between them. Alumni return to spend time with the new interns and to serve as peer role models. However, YAIP providers have had to turn away many eligible youth because of limited capacity.

Recommendation: FPWA urges the City to increase funding for the future and to prioritize YAIP as a critical CEO initiative to maintain and expand in the future.

2. CUNY Prep – CUNY

This program is a joint initiative of the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the Department of Education (DOE), and CUNY designed to help out-of-school youth ages 16 to 18 to obtain a high school degree or GED and enter post-secondary education. Students participate in a college-focused curriculum that provides a holistic, hands-on approach to learning. The school places a strong emphasis on helping students achieve a high score on the GED. The curriculum includes a foundational introduction to the major academic disciplines, concentration in a specific application, which includes the option of taking up to 9 credits of college courses, and the design of a final product before taking the GED. Electives are offered in areas that help youth stay excited about school, such as fashion, cooking and photography. A non-traditional grading system focuses on students' competencies, so youth know from the beginning how they will be evaluated. In addition, CUNY Prep fosters "civic minded adolescents" who take action on important policy issues. In 2005, when the school was at risk of being de-funded, the students organized a march

on City Hall to save CUNY Prep from the budget cuts. After completing their GED, students receive advisement through the College Access Unit within CUNY Prep and are directly linked to courses as part of the CUNY College Now program. CUNY Prep also has established partnerships with other community-based organizations to link students to other social services they need, such as housing, child care and transportation. Outcomes have been very positive. Since 2003, over 530 youth have earned a GED and over 230 have enrolled in college. The school takes aggressive steps to help youth achieve the goal of entering college and succeeding once they enroll. Students have the opportunity to participate in college tours in cohorts with their College Access counselor. The College Access Unit tracks obstacles and barriers to prevent youth from dropping out. Once students enter the College Now program, they receive ongoing assistance in overcoming barriers and retaining financial aid. CUNY Prep is also working to establish relationships with other colleges and to conduct more outreach to youth aging out of the foster care system.

Recommendation: FPWA urges the City to increase funding for this program in the future. This additional funding would allow the program to: 1) expand capacity and increase enrollment (currently waiting lists exceed 150 youth for each cycle), 2) build curricula for students at lower reading levels, and 3) accelerate learning through the use of technology. In addition, increased funding will build upon the College Now 2 and the College Access Retention and Success (“CARS”) programs that help improve retention rates for students so that they can complete their college degree.

3. Community-Based Outreach Initiative – SBS

This program seeks to forge new partnerships between community-based organizations and the Workforce 1 Career Centers through the following initiatives administered by the Department of Small Business Services (SBS):

- **Community Partners** – Centers are expanding outreach to community-based organizations (CBOs) to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of workforce development services. The CBO and Center partnership allows job candidates to be pre-screened to ensure their readiness for work before referring them to the Center. Once they are ready, these candidates can be directed straight to the employer for the job interview, bypassing the lengthy assessment process. When candidates referred to the Center are not job ready or do not follow through with an appointment, feedback is provided to the CBO. This strengthens the partnership and helps the CBO improve upon its methods of working with clients.
- **Community Outreach Teams** – These teams provide a direct link between the Center and CBO to build a pipeline of job seekers for immediate job placement. Under the partner strategy, at least 70% of clients must come from high-poverty communities. To accomplish this, networking between Centers and local CBOs is essential. Teams can come to the CBO and help CBO enter into Partner Network Agreement with Center. The Centers are built upon “universal access.” In partnerships, CBO is responsible for conducting pre-screening of clients based on employer requirements of job candidates.
- **Individual Training Grant (ITG) Process** – Centers seek to exhaust all available free training first, including Center-based training. CUNY-based literacy programs are also available and are geared to help job seekers quickly obtain a credential and qualify for employment. ESL and GED preparation classes are directly linked to employment preparation services. If clients need to combine education with immediate job placement, the Centers will work with them to design a schedule that works for them.

The Door (affiliated with University Settlement, an FPWA member agency), is a CBO that offers career development programs for young adults. As part of this CEO initiative, the Door formed a new partnership with the Brooklyn Workforce 1 Career Center. Through this partnership, they were able to facilitate job placements for youth 18 years of age and older and fill large job orders with

specific employers. The Door pre-screens youth job seekers to refer only those youth who are qualified for specific jobs. This has been a very effective partnership in creating new opportunities that were previously less accessible to these young adults. Specifically, since the CBO performs the pre-screening, youth who are referred to the Center can go through an accelerated intake and registration process and more quickly obtain job interviews. Also, when there is a problem, feedback and open communication between the CBO and Center allows for continued improvement of services to ensure appropriate matching between job seekers and business workforce needs. This strengthens the overall partnership and facilitates program improvement.

Recommendation: Increase outreach and the number of partnerships between CBOs and the Workforce 1 Career Centers in all boroughs throughout the City. Continue to expand job opportunities to populations with greater barriers to employment through strengthening these partnerships, whereby the CBO provides pre-screening, referral, and wrap-around social services that enhance job readiness skills and job performance among these populations.

We are also supportive of the following CEO programs:

4. CUNY Accelerated Student in Associate Programs (ASAP) – CUNY

CUNY ASAP provides extensive support to help students and working adults complete Associate's Degrees. The program increases access to college for low-income individuals and provides tuition assistance, free textbooks, and free MetroCards. Students receive intensive, individualized support and learn as part of a cohort group in a specific academic area. In addition, prior to entering the program, students participate in a pre-college summer program which teaches them skills they need to successfully complete college-level coursework. Class scheduling is designed to accommodate the needs of non-traditional students by enrolling them in 12-credit semesters and setting them on a path for graduation in three years. Upon graduation, students are qualified for positions in high-demand fields, such as health care and early childhood education. To be eligible

for the program, students must have income at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level. Students were recruited for the program in 2007 from specific low-income neighborhoods. All students qualify for financial aid. They also receive tutoring, assistance with job search, and child care. Some participants are also public assistance recipients.

Recommendation: This is an excellent college-access model which should be expanded to more people in poverty, particularly public assistance recipients and others living in low-income communities throughout New York City.

5. Increase Receipt of Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

This initiative helps eligible low-income New Yorkers claim the EITC by providing them with completed amended tax returns for prior tax years. FPWA strongly supports outreach to all low-income workers eligible for the EITC to maximize take-up rates. In addition, we advocate for greater access to free tax preparation services to low-income communities to minimize the use of for-profit tax preparers that offer Refund Anticipation Loans (RALs) that often leave low-income families in greater debt in the long-run. FPWA also spearheaded an effort that led to the introduction of new State legislation in 2008 – **A.11826 Rules (John)** – to create a **State-funded EITC for young low-income workers** ages 17-24 without children who are currently ineligible until they turn 25 years of age. We are also supportive of federal legislation to reduce the minimum age of eligibility for childless workers and to increase the benefit for childless workers and non-custodial parents.

FPWA would also like to comment on the new **CEO Poverty Measure**, since we did not submit testimony on this issue previously.

- The new measure reflects excellent progress in moving toward an “Economic Security Standard” approach to measuring poverty. By accounting for the full “market basket” of basic necessities, along with the regional cost of living differences, this new measure is a

significant improvement over the current federal method of calculating the poverty threshold and poverty rate. In addition, it is impressive that the new CEO measure also takes into account the costs of work, specifically transportation and child care.

- While it is also important that an updated measure include tax credits and in-kind benefits, such as Food Stamps and housing subsidies, it is important to think about the real impact of these benefits on low-income families' financial situations. For example, the EITC provided to custodial parents must be offset by the real annual costs of raising a child (or children). Another example is the fact that Food Stamps typically do not cover the monthly costs of food for most households that receive them.
- In considering ways of using this new measure to create new policies, it is very important to evaluate where the new CEO measure falls short. For example, there are many hidden costs of poverty which are difficult to capture by one measure. These include: energy/rent arrears, debt owed from RALs, the costs of searching for a job and accessing education/training programs, check cashing fees for those without a bank account, the costs of using lease companies to rent furniture and appliances for those without the resources to purchase these items (which end up being most costly in the long-run), and storage costs for those who fall into brief periods of homelessness while they are residing in shelter and looking for a new permanent residence.
- In addition, it is important to examine the financial impact of unemployment, homelessness, domestic violence, disability, mental health and substance abuse issues. All of these struggles also affect a family's overall economic situation.

Lastly, FPWA continues to advocate for comprehensive measures to address poverty. Many of the CEO program components mentioned above are a perfect model for how all systems serving people in poverty should operate. These programs feature a strength-based, client-centered

approach toward providing services. They facilitate improved working relationships between government and non-profit agencies and break down barriers to employment for those in poverty. Specifically, programs that focus on building career ladders, expanding access to basic and higher education, creating links to supportive services, providing individualized counseling and support, and taking a family-oriented approach are best in facilitating a pathway out of poverty. Therefore, we strongly urge the City Council to work with the Mayor to infuse these qualities into other public systems serving populations in poverty. We are happy to serve as a resource for you in offering suggestions on how best to accomplish this goal.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to testify today.