

Jobs and Economic Development Finance Division
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: Youth Unemployment Insurance

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

We would like to thank the Committee for giving the issue of youth unemployment insurance a hearing.

We urge the Committee to move Minnesota into alignment with other states and remove the barrier of high school enrollment status from consideration for unemployment insurance. For high school students, who otherwise meet the eligibility for unemployment insurance, this denial causes a significant disruption in their ability to make ends meet. These young people are working to pay bills and utilities, contribute to rent, and save funds to make their postsecondary dreams a reality. The 1939 law that excludes enrolled high school from unemployment benefits (that they contribute to!) does not fit the needs of our current community. It forces young people to confront whether they must drop out of school to receive the needed benefits. This will have long-range impact on the quality of our workforce.

Furthermore in this time of global pandemic, our federal government took the lead on the CARES Act to provide relief to everyday Americans. The Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) provides additional assistance as the states closed to preserve the health of all citizens. This additional \$600/week helps individual families and props up our local economy. Other states clearly added high school students into the PUA, which means other states have more money for local recovery. Minnesota is leaving money on the table by leaving out hard working youth.

Project for Pride in Living (PPL) provides high-quality affordable housing and pathways to family-sustaining wage careers in the metro area. We operate two contract alternative high schools and lead innovative LEAP (Learn. Earn. Achieve. Potential.) collective-impact initiative that centers the needs of youth (aged 15-21) who are county-involved to help them plot a career pathway. The young people that we work with demonstrate their brilliance and resilience every day, as they balance the needs of their family and community, work, school, and still find time to plot a course for a productive future. This current crisis has forced many of the young people to confront the decision to leave school to access unemployment benefits.

With our experience in this work, we see the effects of Minnesota's profound racial disparities in housing, income, and education. We know that this barrier to supporting working youth disproportionately impacts young people of color and young indigenous people. As we see the state's leaders working tirelessly to apply an equity lens, this policy shift will have a dramatic impact.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul D. Williams
President and CEO

