



2021 Legislative Concept Proposal LC 596 - Youth Employment Opportunities

Problem

Oregon youth, particularly those from communities of color, rural communities, and generational poverty, lack access to career-connected learning opportunities that help develop essential employability skills, offer career exposure, and provide workforce training to prepare them for a successful transition into postsecondary education or the workforce. This is particularly problematic in light of the Coronavirus pandemic's impact on the unemployment rate and overall economy.

Background

In a favorable economic environment, youth already have a significantly higher unemployment rate than average. History shows that when the economy slows and unemployment rises that disparity between youth and adults is compounded, and current data suggest that trend holds true for the current economic situation. In April 2020, the national unemployment rate among 16-19 year-olds was 31.9 percent – more than double the overall unemployment rate. 20-24 year-olds fared a little better with an unemployment rate of 25.7% in April.

Further, the racial/ethnic disparities that we see in unemployment among the general population are mirrored among youth. While the April 2020 unemployment rate for teens and young adults disaggregated by race/ethnicity is not yet available, we do have those rates for the first quarter of 2020. Black or African American teenagers and Hispanic or Latino teenagers had an unemployment rate of 22.8 percent and 14.8 percent, respectively, in the first quarter of 2020, compared to the overall teenage unemployment rate of 12.7 percent. These rates do not reflect the major impacts of COVID-19, but we do know that the pandemic has disproportionately harmed communities of color in a number of other ways.

In order to close these gaps, particularly for youth from underserved and underrepresented communities, we must provide young Oregonians with work experience – to put money in their pockets now and to ensure that they are competitive job candidates in the future. Yet, the initiatives in Oregon that provide this type of career-connected learning and essential employability skills development are underfunded and can align better to the needs of communities of color.

Proposed Solution

The proposal makes several changes to the Oregon Youth Employment Program to improve opportunities for underrepresented communities, in particular by adding a minimum wage requirement for interns in state work programs, adding minimum requirements for inclusion of individuals from communities of color in programs and

consultation with communities of color in designing work programs, and targeting opportunities to in-demand occupations. The proposal also requests better funding of youth employment programs.