

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 47

BY SENATOR DUPLESSIS

A RESOLUTION

To create and provide for the Louisiana Opportunity Youth Task Force.

WHEREAS, according to the latest United States Census, almost one in five Louisianians live in poverty and one in four children in the state grow up in poverty, and sizeable inequality and disparities remain, especially for Louisiana's disconnected youth; and

WHEREAS, an "opportunity youth" is defined as a person between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four years who is not enrolled in school, does not work, or is a teen or young adult involved with the foster care, juvenile justice, or homeless systems; and

WHEREAS, opportunity youth facing socioeconomic and systemic barriers are oftentimes disconnected from education and workforce training opportunities, preventing young people of color, especially, from accessing Louisiana's prosperity; and

WHEREAS, the cost of failing young people at this critical juncture in their lives has significant long-term costs to them as individuals and to society at large; and

WHEREAS, the White House Council for Community Solutions commissioned a study entitled, "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth", estimating that in the year 2011 alone taxpayers "shouldered more than \$93 billion to compensate for lost taxes and direct costs to support young people disengaged from both education and work," while the long-term societal costs were projected to be \$4.7 trillion over their lifetimes; and

WHEREAS, data collected from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census shows that there were 4.7 million disconnected youth nationwide, or about one in eight young people; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana has the second-highest youth disconnection rate in the country, with 17.7 percent (96,000) of youth sixteen to twenty-four years of age neither in school nor at work, compared to 12.1 percent nationally; and

WHEREAS, the latest ACS data indicates that nationally in 2021, fifteen percent (307,954) of youth sixteen to nineteen years of age were not in school in the previous three months and 38.4 percent of young adults twenty to twenty-four years of age were unemployed (8.9 percent or 225,942); and

WHEREAS, research shows that more than twenty-five percent, or about 745,214, of Louisiana's youth is not a part of the labor force at all; and

WHEREAS, in Louisiana in 2020, opportunity youth were 1.7 times more likely to live below the poverty line as connected youth, disconnected women were three times more likely to be mothers as their connected peers, and over ten percent of disconnected youth and twenty-five percent of disconnected young Black men are living in an institution; and

WHEREAS, a greater proportion of Louisiana's opportunity youth were living in poverty relative to their connected peers (37.1 percent and 22.9 percent, respectively) and over one-half of the state's opportunity youth (19 to 24 years of age) has no education beyond a high school diploma, relative to their connected peers (50.7 percent and 28.5 percent, respectively); and

WHEREAS, opportunity youth face unique employment, education, and training barriers that often do not align with efforts that center adults; and

WHEREAS, in Louisiana, 2021 ACS data indicates the rate of disconnection among Black youth (27.9%) was more than twice that of White youth (11.3%); and

WHEREAS, Black and Latino adolescents are not only disproportionately more likely to come from low-income households and have experienced past trauma, but are faced with discrimination that can derail their physical and mental well-being; and

WHEREAS, despite declines in youth incarceration, significant gaps remain as youth of color are over-represented in our criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, prioritizing opportunity youth will not only expand their education and workforce opportunities, but also expand the pool of talent that employers can access to meet their workforce needs, while averting the societal costs associated with disconnection.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby establish and provide for the Task Force on Louisiana's Opportunity Youth to study ways of improving the lives of this population, and to propose recommendations, together with specific proposals for legislation, if the task force deems it necessary and appropriate.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force should include consideration of the following:

(1) Funding for education and workforce training programs that center opportunity youth and create pathways to good jobs.

(2) Expansion of innovative "earn and learn" opportunities, including apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities.

(3) Advancement of dual enrollment implementation, which allows opportunity youth to earn college credit while earning their high school equivalency.

(4) Ensure that opportunity youth will be included in research conducted by the Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center.

(5) The protection and strengthening of social safety net investments for opportunity youth that support basic needs such as food, housing, internet access, transportation, childcare, health, and mental health care, enabling them to complete their education and training goals, including removing barriers to accessing student financial aid programs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force shall consist of the following members:

- (1) The secretary of the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC), or her designee, and one additional staff member having knowledge of workforce programming.
- (2) The superintendent of the Louisiana Department of Education, or his designee.
- (3) The president of Louisiana's Community and Technical Colleges (LCTCS), or his designee.
- (4) Two members of the Louisiana Opportunity Youth Coalition.
- (5) The executive director of the Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center, or his designee.
- (6) The secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH), or his designee.
- (7) The secretary of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), or his designee.
- (8) Lived experts of Louisiana's opportunity youth population current or past.
- (9) The commissioner of higher education, or her designee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that each designating authority shall submit the names of designees to the task force to the Louisiana Workforce Commission no later than August 15, 2024.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Workforce Commission shall provide staff support as needed by the task force.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that no later than September 15, 2024, the secretary of the Louisiana Workforce Commission shall convene the first meeting of the task force, at which the members may elect a chairman, vice chairman, and other officers as the task force deems appropriate.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in conducting this study, the task force may seek input and advice from any interested stakeholder, including: individuals who have personal experience with the target population; direct service providers; opportunity youth current and past.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a majority of the task force shall constitute a quorum for the transition of business, and all official actions of the task force shall require the affirmative vote of a majority of members.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the task force shall serve without compensation, except per diem or expenses reimbursement to which they may be individually entitled as members of their constituent organizations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Task Force on Louisiana Opportunity Youth may submit its findings and recommendations, if any, in the form of a written report to the secretary of the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the Senate and House committees on Labor and Industrial Relations, the Senate and House committees on Education, and the David R. Poynter Legislative Research Library as required by R.S. 24:771 and 772, no later than February 1, 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the secretary of the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health, the secretary of the Department of Children and Family Services, the superintendent of the Louisiana Department of Education, the president of Louisiana's Community and Technical Colleges, the executive director of the Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center, and the Louisiana Opportunity Youth Coalition.

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE