



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FEB 18 1963

TESTIMONY BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND
MANPOWER OF THE SENATE LABOR AND PUBLIC
WELFARE COMMITTEE ON S. 1.

Thank you for the opportunity to join this unique panel of witnesses appearing here today in support of S. 1, the bill to establish a Youth Conservation Corps and authorize local area youth employment programs.

All of us have our special responsibilities, but they meet in this area. We are all very much concerned with various problems confronting the youth of our country.

The Attorney General, as you know, is chairman of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. While S. 1 is not primarily designed as an anti-delinquency bill, we believe its enactment would have a far-reaching beneficial effect in this field.

It would light a beacon of hope for thousands of young people who otherwise may turn to crime out of sheer despair.

The President's Committee has been working for over a year with local agencies and research institutions on the causes and antidotes for juvenile delinquency.

Frankly, we have found the problem far more serious than we thought. It is no exaggeration to say that we are racing the clock against disaster.

There are about 700,000 out-of-school unemployed youth in the country now, and the number is growing every day. They have no skills in a world growing more specialized all the time.

Many of them feel, with some cause, that the wheel of fortune is rigged against them. They are falling farther and farther behind in the race for the good things of life. Is it any wonder that more and more of these young people are turning to crime in a hopeless effort to catch up?

We must give the members of this new Lost Generation some real hope in order to prevent a shattering explosion of social problems in the years to come.

S. 1 tackles the problem by creating an employment program for jobless school drop-outs.

The President's Committee has seen dramatic evidence that this approach will work in both city and rural areas. We have already found out that one of the best ways to combat juvenile delinquency is to provide jobs for potential delinquents. The response by the young people involved has been immediate and enthusiastic.

Most are eager to work on jobs within their reach. The vast majority don't want to be hoodlums. Give them half a chance and they'll work hard, improve themselves, pick up skills, and become useful, valuable members of the community.

In Lane County, Oregon, a rural area, for example, state and county authorities combined appropriations to set up forestry work camps for potential school dropouts in the summer of 1961.

Twenty boys took part. They were neither juvenile delinquents nor "All Americans," but more or less average youngsters from impoverished families, who had begun to lose serious interest in schools.

These boys worked on full-scale Forestry Department projects that summer--clearing and pruning, thinning and park-building. Officials agree that the program was a total success. The boys did one-third more work than average adult crews, according to State Forestry Department Estimates. But, most important, they all returned to school with increased enthusiasm.

The President's Committee, out of funds appropriated by Congress, has awarded a grant to Lane County to plan a comprehensive program of action against juvenile delinquency in a rural area, following the leads developed in that first project.

On New York City's Lower East Side, we are helping the city and private agencies finance a comprehensive action program now, called Mobilization For Youth.

A work program, geared to the special needs of youngsters from city slums is a vital part of Mobilization For Youth. It includes a Youth Job Center, which helps young people find work in private employment, and an Urban Service Corps, which helps them learn a trade while earning a little money.

The day the Youth Job Center opened, Oct. 15, 1962, almost 100 boys and girls were on its doorstep. To date over 1,200 teenagers have applied for jobs. They have come from all over the city, including Brooklyn and the Bronx, as well as the neighborhood selected for the project. The Center is currently working with about 300 full-time youngsters.

The greatest problem, officials tell us, is that only about 10 per cent of the applicants have enough skill to hold down a job in the competitive labor market.

Unskilled youth are put in the Urban Youth Service Corps. The corps is divided into three parts: Work Exploration, Work Projects and on-the-job training.

In the Work Exploration phase, the inexperienced youth tries several types of work for four weeks to determine which is best for him. He works from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., punches a time clock, and earns 75 cents an hour while developing work habits. Test jobs include clerical work, masonry, electrical assembly, woodworking, hospital aides or food service.

After Work Exploration, the youth are assigned to specific projects under

supervision by skilled craftsmen. The pay starts at \$1 an hour and rises to \$1.12 and \$1.25. The work is done for non-profit agencies, under contract. One team is now rebuilding an old store which will become a neighborhood center. Another crew is repairing a settlement house roof.

Finally the youths move into on-the-job training with private employers--printing shops, auto parts stores, gas stations, etc. Trainees are paid the going rate for the job with Mobilization and the employer sharing the cost. When the training period is over, Mobilization expects the employer to offer the trainee a steady job.

As of February 15, 1963, there were 204 youngsters in the Urban Youth Service Corps--32 in Work Exploration; 132 on Work Projects; 20 in on-the-job training and 20 in private industry.

Many of these youngsters never had any reason to get up in the morning. They slept until noon, and stayed out most of the night. Some were members of fighting gangs.

Now they have a purpose in life, regular hours and regular pay. They are no longer bums in the eyes of their parents and friends, or their own eyes. Now, instead of fighting, they are working alongside members of other gangs on the same projects.

What has been done in Oregon and New York can be extended to many other communities, if S. 1 passes. Title I provides for establishment of the Youth Conservation Corps, with places in camps for up to 15,000 youngsters in the first year, and for 60,000 in the next four years. Title II provides for joint federal-local community employment programs, along the lines of Mobilization for Youth, with places for up to 50,000 youngsters at a time.

This will not by any means eradicate our juvenile delinquency problem, of course, but it will show hundreds of thousands of teenagers that we care, we know what the problems are, and that we are working on it. States and local communities, and individual employers, may follow through with more help of their own.

We regard this bill as an essential part of President Kennedy's program to give all of America's young people equality of opportunity. Congress has done a great deal to stimulate our economy and relieve depressed areas.

There is no area more depressed than a stout young heart with no hope.

We urge the Committee and the Congress to approve this program, to fan the spark of hope and self-respect for our young people everywhere. It will make America a better, and a safer, place in which to live.