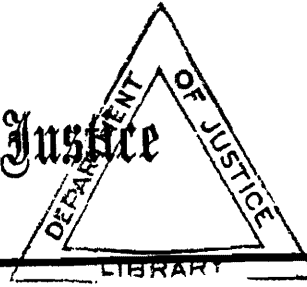




Department of Justice



PS
668
K36

STATEMENT

OF THE

HONORABLE ROBERT F. KENNEDY

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND MANPOWER

OF THE

SENATE LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE COMMITTEE

ON S. 2036 and S. 404

June 23, 1961

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to appear before you today in support of Senate Bill 2036. This bill is of great interest to me as chairman of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. This Committee, which includes the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, is charged with the task of coordinating Federal efforts to help local communities in the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Most of our activities involve the development of appropriate demonstration, training, information and technical assistance programs.

Let me make it clear that the Youth Employment Opportunities Act of 1961 is not primarily concerned with delinquency prevention. Rather, it is designed to help all types of young men or women who suffer deficiencies of training or opportunity which keep them unemployed. Essentially, it aims to serve school dropouts or other young persons who remain unemployed because of a failure to develop the work skills or experience demanded by a competitive labor market. Relatively few young people who fit this description have ever been in real trouble with the law. Nevertheless, we should also face the fact that a disproportionate number of school dropouts and unemployed youth eventually become involved in delinquent conduct.

Just the other day a very dramatic example of this relationship was brought to my attention. The Federal Bureau of Prisons had made a special study of 350 boys sentenced under the Youth Corrections Act. Most of these boys were between 16 and 21 at the time of commitment. Out of this group:

35 percent were functionally illiterate even though most had completed the eighth grade.

Two-thirds of them had no meaningful work experience prior to commitment.

Only two could qualify as skilled workers.

85 percent could not even qualify as semi-skilled workers.

It certainly should not surprise us that a young person without any real stake in a legitimate occupation or career may get into trouble more easily. Such persons readily accept the idea that they have been unjustly deprived of money, status, and opportunity. They can easily become discontented not only with themselves, but with the society of

which they are a part. I am sure that the committee realizes that prolonged unemployment of young persons who hold little hope for the future can lead not only to delinquency, but to even more serious forms of disrespect for law and order.

The statistics on present day delinquency are grave indeed. Our figures show that the national rate for children referred to juvenile courts has doubled in the last twelve years. Statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation for last year indicate that approximately two million young people under 18 were dealt with by the police for misbehavior. These figures also show that young adults from 16 to 25 years of age account for an increasingly larger proportion of total reported crimes for the nation and especially for crimes of violence against other persons. There is little that I need to say to emphasize the tremendous social, economic and personal costs reflected by these figures.

The really dramatic argument for this bill lies in the projected picture of youth problems for the next decade. I agree fully with the assessment recently presented to this committee by Secretary Goldberg. It seems quite clear that the pressures of automation and other economic changes are rapidly reducing the available jobs for unskilled and inexperienced youth. This trend occurs in the face of a rising youth population and estimates of 7.5 million school dropouts in the next decade of whom 2.5 million will not even have finished grade school.

Problems of employment are certainly not the sole cause of delinquency. Yet we have no doubt that adequate opportunities, constructive work, status and pay would lessen delinquency. The measures proposed in this bill represent exploratory steps to find and promote those solutions which will do the most good for the most unemployed youth.

The provisions of this bill seem especially desirable to us because of the flexibility they offer. With three quite different programs to choose from there should be ample opportunity to meet the often widely divergent needs of unemployed youth throughout the country. Furthermore, having the opportunity to demonstrate several methods, will give us a chance to compare their relative values.

Title III proposes development of a Youth Conservation Corps to carry out reclamation and conservation projects. It offers distinctive

advantages for training many young people who aspire to careers in forestry, agriculture, or reclamation work. For some it may afford a valuable period of useful work and training removed from the trainee's local community. Previous experience with conservation programs has shown that young persons having difficulty in finding a place for themselves in their local community often may profit greatly from chances to readjust in a new environment. They acquire a new regard for themselves and acquire new habits of work which serve them well in later life. The history of the Civilian Conservation Corps and various state reclamation programs provides abundant evidence that older youth, especially, often respond favorably to such opportunities to be independent and to acquire new experiences.

The public service projects for local communities provided by Title II offer other advantages of particular importance in the depressed areas of larger cities where the concentration of discontented, unemployed youth is dangerously high. They are considerably less costly than the rural conservation projects since the trainees can continue to live at home. Consequently, when funds are quite limited, these projects reach more young persons who need help. Such urban service projects also may help to preserve constructive community ties with family and friends. In performing useful service young trainees may win new respect in the eyes of adult members of the community. Nor should we overlook the project opportunities for training in work and living habits directly in line with the adult activities they are likely to sustain as long as they continue to reside in the city.

Title I in the bill seeks opportunities for direct on-the-job training. Such programs seem particularly useful in transmitting specialized work skills and knowledge and the immediate satisfactions of a secure job placement. They appear to answer the employment needs of youngsters for whom a comparatively small investment in closely supervised training will bring their production potential to a competitive level. This is likely to be especially important in the rapidly changing job market predicted for youth employment in the next ten years.

We cannot assume that any one program will adequately meet the many different problems presented by this unskilled population of unemployed youth. In our judgment one of the special merits of this bill lies in the opportunity for considerable experimentation in developing those programs best suited to cope with the problems we face.

This bill is not designed to do the whole job. It is frankly experimental in that it seeks to demonstrate several solutions to the problem. The appropriations which are authorized will permit a lot of good work to be done. However, I cannot over-emphasize the fact that these programs and appropriations must be complemented and supplemented by vigorous state and local action. The Federal Government can and should help local communities but the ultimate success of what we propose will surely rest on local shoulders.

If this bill is successful in its aims, it will help us learn how we can create new opportunities for unskilled and inexperienced young people. In the process we may also learn how to quench those feelings of despair and alienation that eventually lead many unemployed youth to illegitimate pursuits. I urge that the committee promptly approve this legislation in its entirety.