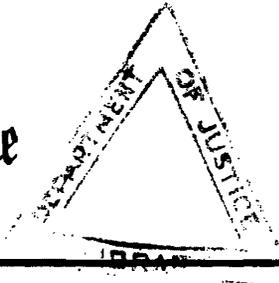




# Department of Justice



TESTIMONY by ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY  
BEFORE THE GENERAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION OF THE HOUSE  
EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE ON H. R. 1890

FEBRUARY 19, 1963

I am pleased to have this chance to testify in support of H.R. 1890.

This is an important bill. It strikes at a problem we can no longer ignore--youth employment. Our country from the beginning has been a land of opportunity. Above all, it has offered success to the man who is willing to work and opportunities to work in the United States have been unlimited. Throughout our history all that has been needed has been a proper mixture of aspiration and ambition.

But our nation's prosperity has created a new condition. From a rich and virgin land has grown a vast, complex industrial civilization. The opportunities to work are just as great and challenging today as ever before. But to get the same chance today, requires greater knowledge and greater skill.

As you know, the Attorney General is chairman of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. The other members are the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

We have been working on these problems for over a year, with funds provided by Congress, in cooperation with local agencies and research institutions. We have found the problem is staggering.

A whole new Lost Generation is growing up in our country, with no skills and little hope. Many of its members are turning to crime to get the things other youngsters get by hard study and work.

But we have also found that several things can, and must, be done to help these deprived youngsters. One of the main things is to train them for jobs.

Let me say now that passage of this bill will enable many other communities to share the benefits of similar job training. It will give our youngsters from coast to coast new hope, and at the same time make our city streets safe.

In 1962, youth from 16 to 21 made up 7% of our labor force. However, they accounted for 18% of our unemployed. Not considering the summer months, it is estimated that about 700,000 youth are out of school and out of work now. Furthermore, this just counts those looking for employment, not those who already may have despaired.

These problems won't disappear. They will get worse in the years ahead. We can expect 26 million young men and women to enter the labor market in the 1960's as compared to 19 million in the 1950's. Of these 26 million, 7 1/2 million will not finish high school. They will

not be prepared for the work we will need most. They will pile up helplessly against the rising barriers to unskilled labor in our advancing economy,

The consequences of these conditions can threaten the life and growth of a free society. The signs are already becoming apparent and this is one of the most serious internal problems facing this nation.

In our largest cities, we find newly submerged populations, economically, socially and politically deprived of the opportunities we would wish for all our citizens. Many of them are new migrants. For them urban residence symbolizes a step closer to their cherished dreams of success. But these hopes for themselves and their children are easily shattered today. They soon discover the decreasing market for unskilled labor, which is usually all they have to offer. Their hope turns to apathy and despair. They lack the understanding of urban life their children need to succeed in their stead. For example, in recent studies in Louisiana and New York, it was found that two-thirds of the parents of dropouts had little regard for the usefulness of an education. They didn't think it mattered much.

In most major cities, the declining opportunities for unskilled workers are further restricted by racial and ethnic discrimination. The dual effect is creating a segregated, immobile population. This is an unhealthy explosive situation for all. It is especially devastating for the youth in urban slum areas. Many come to share the apathy and indifference of their parents, while others rebel in a variety of ways.

A common reaction among these youth is to stop caring about school. The unpromising future makes it seem useless to try to learn. Right here in the District of Columbia, 55% of the youth do not graduate from high school. They drop out as soon as they can, even though the current average unemployment rate among school dropouts, age 16 to 21, is 25 percent. They soon fall into the unemployed and unskilled category. They seem ignorant or indifferent to the fact that two-thirds of the unemployed had not completed high school.

Dorothy Gilliam of the Washington Post is writing an extremely interesting series on the problem of school dropouts. This morning she wrote that the chances are 2 to 1 that a youth who quits school at 16 or 17 must look forward to years of idleness. Mr. Chairman, I would like to quote from her article. She said:

"The inevitable idleness stems from the fact that half these persons will be turned away when they seek jobs.

"It takes a real social minded employer to hire dropouts," Irene Hypps, of the District's school system says.

"Most youths go from job to insignificant job, thwarting in part their reason for dropping out in the first place--to do something, to be recognized for the work they do, to be somebody.

"The jolts these young people get from slammed doors often convince them there's no use trying. A Negro boy dropout who had his first run-in with the law only after he had been rebuffed repeatedly in his job hunt, summed up:

"What's the use? I'm no criminal but...look. I wanted to go into a union trade, to be an apprentice. And I had some qualifications. I couldn't because I'm a Negro. I end up bussing dirty dishes and being called dirty names. Like I say, miss, it's a jungle out there and you have to get 'em before they get you!"

"He thought if there had been someone to tell him what it was like on the outside he would have stayed in school.

"Although a minority of dropouts turn to crime and hoodlumism, their number is enough to make a city's streets unsafe and to terrorize the citizenry."

Yet other studies show it is not due to lack of ambition when real opportunities are offered. The original demonstration program of Higher Horizons in New York City proved this. Children from junior high schools in the poorest areas of the city were offered special instruction, guidance counseling, and a broad program of cultural enrichment, frequently in the company of their parents. Follow-up studies showed an average gain in IQ scores of 17 points for the boys and 11 points for girls. In some cases, IQ scores gained up to 60 points. Furthermore, they did well through high school. In how many other cases today would such a new chance unlock the door to buried talent?

However, the consequences of lack of opportunity bear even more bitter fruit. Acts of crime and delinquency are common among youth frustrated in their search for success in customary channels. Not all unemployed youth or school dropouts get into trouble with the law. But a disproportionate number of them do. A study in Seattle showed that the

rate of delinquency was ten times higher among high school dropouts than among those who graduated. We do not have to assume that one causes the other, but they clearly occur more often together. It is not unreasonable to assume that they both reflect the results of a system of opportunity that is closed rather than open in their local communities.

Each year during the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in recorded delinquency. The juvenile courts have had to commit more and more young people to correctional institutions. State and local governments find it increasingly difficult to provide facilities to rehabilitate these young offenders.

In the year 1960, juvenile court cases increased six percent over 1959, while the child population increased only two percent the same year. Police arrests of juveniles for 1960 were estimated at the dismaying figure of 1 million youngsters. The statistics are borne out in city after city across the country.

However, the statistics provide only part of the picture. In recent years, youth offenses have become more violent and destructive. Juvenile homicide, use of narcotics and alcohol, auto theft, vandalism and sex offenses have spread from the slum areas to other sectors of the metropolitan region.

In my work as Chairman of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, I have been impressed by the need to see these problems of youth unemployment, school failure, and delinquency as related but different reactions to barriers to opportunities. To effectively deal with them, we must strike at the underlying community conditions from which they spring. This means a broad attack with many kinds of programs for youth. Some of these programs must deal with the family problems, others with educational problems. But the most central to the problem are those which strike at the barriers to work opportunities. In some cases, this means upgrading job skills through remedial education and vocational training programs. In others, it means providing protected employment opportunities or breaking down the obstacles set by discriminatory practices.

More and more the labor market demands increased academic, technical and vocational skills.

This, of course, is a major consequence, and a hard one, of the developments in automation and technology. I can't contribute much to the

debate on whether automation creates as many jobs as it demolishes. But it's clear that the kinds of jobs being eliminated are principally of the unskilled variety (by 1970 only 5 percent of the available jobs will be of this type); and it is well known that educational requirements for employment are being raised across the board.

Unemployment will always pinch the dropout hardest, since he is both inexperienced and unskilled. But the point I want to make is this: the unemployed, both young and old, are not unemployed because they are high school dropouts; they are unemployed because the kinds of jobs their training--or lack of training--fits them for are disappearing from the labor market.

We know from hard facts how effective this bill could be. In Lane County, Oregon, during the summer of 1961, the state legislature and the county board of commissioners combined appropriations to establish and operate forestry work camps for potential dropouts. Twenty boys participated. 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. It was believed the program might induce them to complete their education.

These youngsters worked on full-scale Forestry Department projects--clearing and pruning, thinning and park-building. Every evidence is that the program was a total success. The boys not only accomplished one-third more work than do average adult crews (according to State Forestry Department estimates); they also all returned to school with increased enthusiasm.

The problem obviously isn't confined to the urban areas as the Lane County experience demonstrates. But the largest number of unemployed, out-of-school youth are concentrated in the cities. Our committee gave a grant to Lane County to plan a comprehensive program of action against juvenile delinquency in a rural area. We also are assisting many urban communities to plan to meet their problems and in New York City's Lower East Side a major effort--Mobilization For Youth--already is underway. This program, which the President's committee also is assisting is a good example of the kind of project Title II of the Youth Employment Act could support.

A central employment agency--the Youth Job Center--tries to place youngsters in jobs in the regular labor market. The day the Center opened, October 15, 1962, almost 100 boys and girls were on its doorstep.

The interest and response of youth from all over New York City-- as far away as Brooklyn and the Bronx--has not slackened since then. To date, over 800 teenagers have applied for jobs; 600 from within the Mobilization area, 200 from outside. The Center is currently working with about 300 full-time youngsters. The greatest problem, the Center staff found, was that only about 10 percent of the total number of applicants are sufficiently skilled to get jobs in the competitive labor market.

The unskilled youth are referred to the Urban Youth Service Corps, a subsidized work program which serves two purposes: 1) it gets the young people off the streets, and 2) it starts them learning work habits and work skills.

The Corps is divided into three parts: Work Exploration, Work Projects, and on-the-job training. A job counselor may start a boy in any of these phases, depending on his past experience.

Under the Work Exploration phase of the program, 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. Jobs include clerical work, masonry, electrical assembly, woodworking, hospital aides, or food service.

Many of these youth never had a reason to get up in the morning. They slept till noon and stayed out late at night. Now, they tell workers, they no longer feel like bums. In addition, four or five members of different gangs which used to meet for rumbles at night, work on the same projects without incident.

After Work Exploration, the youths are assigned to specific projects under the supervision of skilled craftsmen. Pay starts at \$1 an hour and rises to \$1.12 and \$1.25. These projects are carried out on a contract basis with non-profit agencies or are done at Mobilization work centers. The teenagers are now rebuilding an old store which will be used as a neighborhood center. A masonry crew is repairing a settlement house roof.

Ultimately, the youths move into on-the-job training. Jobs are contracted with private employers such as printing shops, auto parts stores and gas stations. Trainees are paid the going rate for the job, with Mobilization and the employer sharing the cost. When the training is over, Mobilization expects the employer to offer the boy a steady job.

The estimated cost for the Urban Service Corps, for the first year, in Mobilization for Youth is \$383,300--which includes administrative expenses and trainees stipends.

As of January 3, 1963, 212 youngsters have been placed in the Urban Youth Service Corps: 32 in Work Exploration; 101 on Work Projects; 14 in on-the-job training and 65 in private industry.

We lack the resources, however, to support such programs as broadly as the need requires. That is why this bill is so important. It can make a major difference for many young men and women. If we enact this bill we show that we have hope for these young people and an interest in their future; that there are possibilities for improving their way of life and their future, and that we intend to do something about it.

This program would only reach some of the young men and women who need this aid and assistance, but it would have a much broader effect. Their friends, their parents, and their neighbors will see what can be done and what the possibilities are for improving their way of life and their future. The effect on the whole community has been demonstrated by the programs that have been underway in Oregon and New York. So we know what can be done. By showing the interest and dedication of the Government, we can offer something to these boys and girls and enable them and their parents and their friends to see that the future of our youth is our most important problem.

In summary, we think passage of this bill is an essential part of the President's program to give all of America's young people equality of opportunity.

It is also a badly needed weapon in the fight against Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. Its passage will make our cities and towns better places to live, and safer places to live.

It will enable many more cities and towns to profit by the encouraging things we have learned in the work projects in Lane County, Oregon and New York's lower East Side.

Our young people would much rather work than loaf or fight. They will work if given half a chance.

They must have that chance. We hope the Committee and the Congress will act favorably on this bill.