

# Save youth jobs from the budget ax

**G**ov. Cuomo has pledged to attack joblessness among New York's youth of color in the upcoming legislative session. That's positive news coming on the heels of Mayor Bloomberg's recently announced Young Men's Initiative. But with a \$3 billion-plus state budget deficit looming, the governor has a good excuse to put off efforts to improve employment opportunities for minority youth until the state's fiscal conditions improve.

My hope is that, even in this rough economic climate, the governor will find a way to invest in programs that provide job training and opportunities for young adults. In fact, there's a case to be made that doing so is in the best economic interest of the state.

Research has shown that job experience at an early age is a strong predictor of increased employment and earnings in adulthood; conversely, periods of unemployment during young adulthood typically result in diminished chances of being financially stable over one's lifetime. We also know that youth unemployment is at dangerously high levels; the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports a rate of 18%, about twice as high as the overall unemployment rate.

Despite those sobering facts, one of the best programs to help minority youth find jobs — the summer youth employment program — was cut last year. If the governor is serious about his pledge, he should restore the program's funding and expand it to provide year-round work for young people in the most distressed communities. In New York City alone, more than 91,000 young people ages 16 to 24 do not have a high school diploma and are no longer in school. If we really want to promote their success in the labor market, we must provide more opportunities for them to increase their basic skills and pass the GED exam, which is now the bare minimum for entry into most employment opportunities.

Our latest poll on the "Unheard Third" — low-income people often ignored by politicians and the press — found that a majority of New Yorkers not only support in-

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BY DAVID R. JONES

creased spending to improve high school graduation rates and offer young people who have dropped out of school another chance to earn a diploma or GED, they are willing to pay more in taxes to fund such programs. In addition to expanding GED programs, the governor should:

- Invest in year-round training and education programs for disconnected youth.

- Strengthen career and technical education programs, which will help young New Yorkers access high-quality jobs in the future.

- Urge government agencies that receive federal Housing and Urban Development funds to maximize employment opportunities for public housing residents and Section 8 voucher holders, a sizable percentage of whom are young blacks and Latinos.

- Support legislation to help seal the records of young offenders to

give them a fair chance at becoming employable and productive members of society.

Turning to the private sector, the governor

should use his leadership to marshal the help of the state's business and industry leaders to increase job and training opportunities for minority youth. He could offer tax incentives for businesses to hire young adults.

Finally, it's time for New York to make a clear statement to young people that failing to finish high school is unacceptable. Imagine if the same energy and resources devoted to our city's ubiquitous anti-smoking campaign were applied to showing our children what the life chances are for someone without a diploma.

Sadly, there appears to be a short supply of political will to do anything beyond slashing spending and preaching austerity. New York's fiscal problems are real, but so are the risks of long-term social and economic harm if we continue to delay investment in programs that connect impoverished young people of color to educational and skills-based employment opportunities.

*Jones is president and chief executive officer of the Community Service Society of New York.*

Opportunity,  
please