



Saint Paul Church of God in Christ Community Development Ministries, Inc.

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Pastor Kevin Anthony Ford, President

Betty J. Jones, Executive Director

**Committee Hearing: Workforce Development & Strengthening Meaningful Work Experience
Opportunities for Illinois' Jobless Youth**

Date: November 5, 2020

Time: 9:00 am

Re: Senate Higher Ed Subject Matter on Workforce Development

Honorable Members of the Commerce & Economic Development Committee,

The outlook for working people in 2020 is dire. COVID-19 has devastated an already inequitable labor market and left many families without a lifeline. Over 2.4 million Illinoisans have filed for unemployment benefits since March, and the state unemployment rate remains high at around 10%. Families are still struggling to access work. The pandemic and ensuing economic crisis burdens are hitting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in Illinois hardest. The labor market is unpredictable, leaving working Illinoisans struggling to navigate the few jobs that are opening up and creating more significant disparities in the state's hardest-hit communities. BIPOC workers continue to face employment barriers disproportionately, including occupational segregation, disinvestment, housing, transportation, child care issues, and others. Added to this, the challenges of COVID-19's health and economic impacts have left many more households unsure how they will stay housed or fed, let alone how they will advance their career.

Illinois must prioritize state and federal funding to invest in education, skills training, and barrier removal to build the foundation for a widely-shared recovery and re-skill the workforce for a new landscape. Cultivating and investing in our state's diverse talent can unleash regional innovation, economic growth, and community well-being as the economy recovers. Thus far, the federal response has not included nearly enough workforce development, despite unprecedented numbers of unemployed Illinoisans in need of help getting back to work. I am writing to call on legislators to prioritize investments in helping working Illinoisans return to work. The proposed steps are to fund workforce development programs, design policy to remove employment barriers that create disparities, and promote more effective data transparency between state agencies serving Illinoisans. It will help the state better address this economic crisis and to allow our residents to thrive.

Saint Paul Church of God in Christ Community Development Ministries, Inc. (SPCDM), a community based 5013c, dedicated mission is to provide human and social services towards empowerment by providing vocational rehabilitation services, educational support services, job training, and work experience. We proudly serve hard-to-serve and underrepresented populations in the Chicagoland area. Covid-19 has had a devastating

impact on our students/employees, but they faced challenges securing quality employment that predate the pandemic. The ratio of inclusion in the construction career pathway has been a long-standing disparity in constructing economic and workforce developments for the listed populations. Our state's economy will only meet its fullest potential if the most marginalized job seekers are provided with a fair opportunity to participate in the labor market.

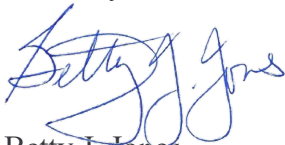
SPCDM supports the pre-apprenticeship system and has a documented record of its ability to effectuate the inclusion of the underrepresented population with an entry of 223 individuals (men and women) into USDOL Registered Apprenticeship Programs.

To support the students/employees we support, we recommend the following policy priorities:

1. Use a racial equity lens to invest state funding in inclusive career pathways programming to ensure shared economic recovery for Illinoisans who face barriers to employment.
2. Align policy to eliminate non-skill barriers to employment disproportionately faced by people of color, foreign-born workers, and women in Illinois.
3. Increase data sharing and transparency across state agencies that touch education and workforce training to identify and address equity gaps in our public investments.

We believe that these policy changes will allow our students/employees to overcome barriers to employment, build the skills they need for in-demand occupations, and retain the jobs that can support them and their families. Investing in a win-win scenario for both job seekers and employers and can help Illinois make a more equitable recovery.

Sincerely,



Betty J. Jones

Executive Director

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