



**National
Urban League**

To Be Equal #28

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Bipartisan Jobs Bill Tackles Urban and Youth Unemployment

Marc H. Morial
President and CEO
National Urban League

“Supporting education and training for our youth is a smart investment that can help rebuild local economies and pay dividends over the long term.” U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

“The future of our economy depends on an educated, skilled workforce that encompasses all individuals – even the most disconnected and at risk.” Congressman Chaka Fattah

Just when it seemed Congress was no longer capable of working together on any level to serve the best interests of the American people, on July 9 members of both parties in the House of Representatives joined forces to pass a new bipartisan jobs bill, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). With the passage of WIOA, millions of unemployed and under-employed workers and urban youth of color can now receive the job and skills training, as well as the support services, they need to chart a path to a better future. The bipartisan vote in the House was 415-6. The Senate passed the bill in June with a 95-3 bipartisan majority, and it is now headed to President Obama's desk for signing.

The decade-plus struggle for Congressional renewal of the nation's preeminent job training legislation was finally won thanks in large part to the tenacity, commitment and leadership of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Rep. Chaka Fattah of Pennsylvania. As co-sponsors of the Urban Jobs Act, a bill advocated and championed by the National Urban League, they helped craft bi-partisan legislation that responds to the education, skills, and employment needs of millions of individuals who are unemployed or under-employed and face multiple barriers to employment. The National Urban League and the advocacy work of our Affiliates on the Urban Jobs Act were the impetus for many of the local youth provisions that are now a part of the WIOA, as well as provisions for funding to non-profit organizations that operate effective workforce training programs. These include a focus on the needs of youth, aged 16-24, including high school drop-outs, and individuals with multiple barriers to employment, such as ex-offenders, youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system and the long-term unemployed.

Passage of this legislation represents a special victory for communities of color where unemployment continues to outpace the national average. In June, overall unemployment

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fell to 6.1% and the rate for whites is now at 5.3%. But African American unemployment remains in double-digits at 10.7%. The rate for Hispanics is 7.8%. Most disturbingly, African American and Hispanic youth continue to experience extremely high rates of unemployment. According to a joint statement from Senator Gillibrand and Congressman Fattah, "The average unemployment rate for minority youth in May was almost 24 percent for African Americans and just over 12 percent for Hispanics. Approximately 5.8 million youth, or nearly 15 percent of 16 to 24 year olds, are neither employed nor attending school, and as a result not developing the skills, education and job experience necessary for quality jobs."

Passage of the Urban Jobs Act provisions in WIOA will help reduce youth unemployment, strengthen our economy and give millions of young people of color access to the education and skills needed for success in work and in life. The legislation also complements the National Urban League's extraordinary \$100 million, five-year Jobs Rebuild America initiative, which is bringing together resources from the government, business and non-profit sectors to help bring jobs and hope back to hard-pressed communities – reducing unemployment, creating jobs and expanding economic opportunity in 50 communities throughout the nation.

The reauthorization of WIOA is also a victory for bipartisanship and responsible government action, two things that have been lacking recently in Washington. As President Obama commented, "Today's vote helps ensure that our workers can earn the skills employers are looking for right now and that American businesses have the talent pool it takes to compete and win in our global economy. I look forward to signing it into law and hope Congress will continue to come together to make progress for America's working families."

We intend to keep up the fight to see that they do.

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