

Chicago Tribune

June 12, 2017

The Midwest's largest reporting team

Pay to train at-risk youths now or the cost will be higher later

By Dahleen Glanton

Much of the news coming out of Chicago hasn't been good for a long time.

Recently, we learned that Chicago was the only major city in the country to lose population last year. According to the U.S. Census, 8,638 Chicagoans left — nearly twice as many as the year before.

In a city of 2.7 million people, that might not seem like such a big deal. But let's look at who those people were. The majority who left were from Chicago's South and West sides, home primarily to African-Americans.

At the same time, Chicago's downtown area is flourishing with new people moving in.

We don't know exactly where the blacks who fled the South and West sides went — maybe to the suburbs or booming areas like Atlanta. But we do know this: They aren't moving into those expensive high-rises with sweeping views of the lake.

We also don't know why they left the city. But it's probably safe to say that they would not have been so eager to leave if their neighborhoods offered even the basic amenities that others in Chicago take for granted.

Chances are many of the blacks who left were the ones who had jobs or retirement income and contributed to the tax base. Poor people often can't afford to leave. They are forced to stay behind, with no training and no diplomas, in neighborhoods where there are no jobs.

According to a study by the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago, 43 percent of black men in Chicago between the ages of 20 and 24 are neither working nor enrolled in school.

The percentages are highest in the city's poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhoods.

In Humboldt Park, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, North Lawndale and South Lawndale on the West Side, 40 percent of



Job seeker Sandra Goulsby, second from left, takes part in a skills test during Career 360, a youth hiring event focused on careers in transportation, distribution and logistics held last month at Lacuna Lofts, 2150 S. Canalport Ave. (Antonio Perez/Chicago Tribune)

this age group was unemployed.

On the South Side, in Greater Grand Crossing, Englewood, West Englewood and Chicago Lawn, that number soared to nearly 49 percent.

We all pay a price for that. Crime is just part of it.

Chicago has had more than 270 homicides so far this year, most of them on the South and West sides. And it isn't even summer.

The institute's report released Monday, "The High Costs for Out of School and Jobless Youth in Chicago and Cook County," does not say that joblessness triggered the recent surge in Chicago's violence, but it does conclude that unemployment and violence are related.

We know about the tax revenue lost when people leave the city, but how much is lost from those who are unemployed or underemployed.

Over a lifetime of work — 45 years — someone who does not have a high school

diploma would contribute \$197,055 less in state and federal taxes than someone who graduated from high school, according to the institute.

In Illinois, 48,108 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are jobless, out of school and have no high school diploma. That amounts to nearly \$9.5 billion lost in federal and state tax revenues over 45 years.

So the question is, what can be done about it?

Sen. Dick Durbin and Rep. Robin Kelly, both Illinois Democrats, think they have an answer. They're proposing joint legislation in Washington to increase job opportunities for at-risk youth.

One bill would encourage businesses to hire at-risk youth who live in impoverished neighborhoods. It would provide a tax credit to businesses that hire and train youths ages 16 to 25. The bill also would double the tax credit for businesses that expand summer jobs programs for 16- and 17-year-olds to include year-round employment.

The second bill would provide \$3.5 billion in competitive grants for local governments and community groups to expand summer and year-round jobs programs for young people.

It sounds like a great idea. But where will Durbin and Kelly get the \$3.5 billion?

Under President Donald Trump's proposed budget, job training programs have been slashed, and Republicans haven't been interested in funneling money into urban areas for such projects.

I spoke to Durbin by telephone Friday, and he acknowledged that their proposals are inconsistent with the Trump budget.

"If you look at the Trump budget, we don't have a chance," he said. "We hope Congress will rewrite the budget."

Now here's where you come in. I can't tell you how many times I get emails from readers asking what they can do to help ease the violence in Chicago.

One thing they — and you — can do is to contact our representatives in Washington and tell them to add money to the budget to put young people to work.

Even if you don't support these two particular bills, there are lots of other programs across the country that will be cut next year because the funds aren't there. That means young people in Chicago and elsewhere will have fewer options to keep them off the streets.

According to Durbin, taxpayers are going to end up footing the bill for these young people one way or the other.

"We can pay for summer jobs or, if their lives fail and they become statistics, we'll pay through either welfare or something else," he said.

There's truth in that. The politicians in Washington who have written off these young people can simply tune Durbin and Kelly out.

They are obligated to listen to you.

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For the full report, *The High Costs for Out of School and Jobless Youth in Chicago and Cook County*, by the University of Illinois at Chicago Great Cities Institute [click here](#).