

RE: EC18.6 - Investing In Youth, Empowering Our City's Potential: Creation of a Toronto Youth Employment Program

Dear Chair and Members of Economic and Community Development Committee,

On behalf of Social Planning Toronto, we wish to express our support for Councillor Parthi Kandavel and Councillor Jamaal Myers recommendation to create a Toronto Youth Employment Program in partnership with the Toronto Youth Cabinet.

Throughout the 2025 municipal budget process, Social Planning Toronto mobilized community groups to urge City Council to invest more in programs and services that address the root causes of poverty, such as expanding access to employment, training and mentoring opportunities for youth. While we saw significant achievements through the 2025 budget - such as investments in the Student Nutrition Program, Youth Violence Prevention Program, Indigenous Youth Fellowship Program, Toronto Public Library Youth Hubs, and youth community development initiatives - there are still significant gaps to adequately address the realities of Toronto's youth.

Ontario's youth unemployment rate hit 18.2% in December 2024, with Toronto's rates sitting at 16.8% in November 2024. Research has demonstrated clear links between youth unemployment and increased risks of youth violence and crime, leading to justice system involvement. The City has recognized youth unemployment rates as an "emerging crisis" and established a target in the Action Plan for Toronto's Economy aimed at creating 10,000 summer jobs for young people by 2026. In order to reach this goal, it is imperative that the City swiftly advance dedicated strategies and investments in youth employment, with a focus on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving groups.

The target for youth employment is taking place within the backdrop of significant funding cuts to youth dedicated programming at the provincial level. Ontario's employment services system has been undergoing a massive transformation aimed at integrating employment programs with social assistance, and Toronto is the latest region to undergo this change. The transformation has led to a number of challenges, notably cuts to dedicated youth employment programs such as Youth Job Connection. Given these challenges, the City is in a unique position to advocate for the Province, along with the Federal government through its Canada Summer Jobs program, to address its employment service gaps and invest into a multi-sectoral Toronto Youth Employment Program.

We believe it is important for the City to recognize that delays on this proposal will have dire consequences on youth wellbeing and safety, and encourage Council to stay on track for achieving its goal by Summer 2026. We also believe it is important for the City to determine how it will sustain this level of jobs for future generations of youth seeking employment, as opposed to a one off goal for only one year. If properly implemented, the Toronto Youth Employment Program could be integral to the development and rollout of the Inclusive Economic Development Framework and Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MS", followed by a horizontal line.

Mercedes Sharpe Zayas
Program Manager, Community Wealth Building
Social Planning Toronto