

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

February 26, 2025

To: Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee and City Council

The Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN) is a supporter of the advocacy for youth opportunities in Toronto and we welcome today's report which outlines comprehensive steps towards the development of a Toronto Youth Employment Program. With the highest rates of youth unemployment since 2014 (19.8%, 2024 for all youth) and significant underemployment amongst young people in Toronto, the City has a distinct role to play as an employer, purchaser and developer to enable pathways into meaningful employment and decent work opportunities for vulnerable youth, especially Black youth who face higher rates of unemployment and systemic barriers to employment including anti-black racism.

We would like to recognize the investments in the most recent 2025 budget to support youth. Initiatives like the expansion of school nutrition programs, funding for additional youth hubs and after school programs in priority neighbourhoods are important early interventions and essential in supporting young people on the right path.

A well developed Youth Employment Program and strategy must centre youth voices from across the City and ensure that all City levers are utilized. City policies, strategies and programs will also need to be reviewed and enhanced, with urgency, to maximize its full potential in creating meaningful opportunities for youth in priority neighbourhoods.

Since 2015, the TCBN has led programs and services supporting equity deserving populations including Black youth across the City of Toronto through construction sector job skills training, mentorship, networking opportunities, wraparound support, and tailored programming for equity-deserving groups.

Through our advocacy for Community Benefits Agreements and community benefits programs tied to public infrastructure and urban development projects, the TCBN have supported pathways for over 1,500 young people into various public infrastructure and urban development projects including LRT and subway transit projects, the Casino Woodbine expansion, TCHC revitalization, Housing Now and new capital projects like City of Toronto Etobicoke Civic Centre which is currently in construction.

We are also leading advocacy and working with the City of Toronto Community Benefits team in SDFA and the FIFA Secretariat on a Community Benefits Plan for FIFA Men's World Cup 2026 with a focus on equitable youth employment.

Through such initiatives, important learnings and best practices that the City should consider include:

- a) **City levers and policies** - Utilizing City levers as an employer, procurer and purchaser, economic development and housing incentives and developer to establish equitable pathways for young people into jobs and decent work opportunities
- b) **Accountability and Transparency** - setting measurable targets for equitable hiring and including monitoring, reporting and evaluation for transparency
- c) **Community outreach and engagement** - Deep community outreach and engagement in priority neighbourhoods to share information on jobs, training and opportunities
- d) **Leverage existing community assets and programs** - Identify, support and collaborate with existing community organizations, programs and initiatives that support youth engagement, services, programs, mentorship, community safety and programming
- e) **Cross-sectoral partnerships and customized recruitment** - engaging unions and employers to support equitable pathways into meaningful employment and decent work opportunities, customized youth-focused recruitment approaches and career advancement initiatives

We know this work takes significant leadership, buy-in and collaboration across multiple City divisions, boards, agencies and corporations and we are in full support of the review and enhancement of city policies, strategies, programs and initiatives that prioritize outreach, recruitment and hiring of youth from priority neighbourhoods.

We are encouraged by the recent work of the City of Toronto Economic Development & Culture Division that has identified targeted youth employment as part of its Action Plan for Toronto's Economy and its commitment to working with community partners and stakeholders like the TCBN to inform the City of Toronto Inclusive Economic Development Framework. City Planning processes through Secondary Plans and associated community development plans in Jane-Finch and Downsview have also identified the need for local and equitable employment approaches that ensure existing communities benefit from the growth.

With an operating budget of over \$18B and a 10-year capital budget estimated at over \$59B, significant City investments to boost and support economic development and housing, planning tools and a Toronto Public Service of over 40,000 staff including permanent, temporary, part-time and recreational staff (not including agencies, corporations and boards), the City has an important role to play and we support the adoption of all of these levers to support equitable employment pathways and opportunities for vulnerable youth across Toronto.

Sincerely,



Rosemarie Powell
Executive Director, Toronto Community Benefits Network