

State Division of Budget Hearings, November 29, 2007
Testimony: Ketny Jean-Francios, CVH Board Member
Expansion of the Transitional Jobs Program Across NYS

My name is Ketny Jean-Francois and I am a single mother and an unemployed, low-income person, living in the South Bronx. I am a leader at Community Voices Heard (CVH), an organization made up of low-income New Yorkers fighting to impact and monitor policies that affect our lives. This afternoon, I will give my testimony on my experience and feelings about working in the unpaid mandated Work Experience Program and the need to expand paid Transitional Jobs across New York State for people on public assistance who are also job seekers, have families, bills and responsibilities.

Poverty is being unemployed and it is also being stuck, like I am, in government programs that use people as unpaid laborers. For almost one year I worked as an unpaid WEP worker at a CUNY college as a clerical worker at the student's health office. We were not screened or given a background check. Therefore it appears that anyone (WEP workers) can work there without a background check and could access the student's personal information. In light of identity theft you would think the government would be more careful on how they come up with these placements. I have been stuck in the unpaid work experience program. I have a young son age 4 years old. I have to provide clothing, and daily expenses, household items, pay my light bill, telephone bill and most of time I am only left with \$2.00 to live on. Most of the time when my food stamps run out before the next food stamp pick-up date I have to buy food on my own. Also, I have to use my food stamps to buy lunch at the WEP sites if

there are stores that will take the food stamps in the area. I do not receive a wage, nor benefits of vacation, sick or personal days and no chances of actually getting a real job at the unpaid WEP site, let alone a promotion at the site or a title in exchange for my labor. I am not entitled to the Earned Income Credit benefits because I do not get paid. I cannot use the unpaid Work Experience job on my resume because there is no one that potential employers can call to verify that I work there because most of the people don't know who the unpaid WEP workers are. There is a constant stream of WEP workers coming and going at the work sites. Most of the other paid employees at the sites don't want us there anyway because we have been imposed on them and they seem prejudiced against WEP workers.

Recommendation

As a single mother, public assistance recipient and board member at Community Voices Heard, we would like to see New York State become number one in the nation for creating more paid Transitional Job pathways for people who are the public assistance job seekers, the disconnected youth and individuals with a history of incarceration by including \$80 million dollars in the 2008-09 budget that would support the Transitional Jobs Initiative creating 4,000 jobs across New York State.