

Good morning, Chair, Committee Members, and City Staff,

My name is Kim Patel and I am Vice President of Employment, Training & Legal Services at The Neighbourhood Group Community Services. We are a multi-service, community based organization here in Toronto.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on Action 16 of the Sidewalks to Skylines Action Plan, specifically the goal of creating 10,000 summer jobs for youth by 2026.

We are at a crisis point in our city for youth employment programming. At The Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNGCS), we have been delivering youth employment programs since 1983, but I cannot recall a time when youth faced as many barriers to support as they do today. Provincially funded programs—such as Youth Job Connection and Youth Job Connection Summer—are winding down, and City of Toronto-funded social assistance programs under the Purchase of Employment Services umbrella will end this year. In addition, federally funded programs under the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy funding also been dramatically scaled back. These reductions are dismantling vital support structures for our city's youth.

This comes at a time when youth unemployment rates remain high, even as the broader labour market tightens. The combination of reduced programming and high unemployment has created a perfect storm, leaving many of our city's youth without the necessary opportunities to build their futures. What's more, the generation of youth who experienced the upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to face "career scarring," which has long-term implications for their employment prospects, earnings potential, and ability to thrive in adulthood.

We know that early and sustained access to the labour market is crucial for long-term success. The evidence is clear: the earlier youth gain access to meaningful work opportunities, the better their chances of sustained employment and economic independence later in life. These early experiences lay the groundwork for a successful transition into adulthood, helping youth develop critical skills, build networks, and establish a solid work history.

What's at Stake

Investing in youth employment is an investment in our collective future. Without the support of government-funded initiatives, we are not only failing our young people but also undermining the long-term economic health of our city. Youth who miss out on early employment opportunities are more likely to face long-term unemployment or underemployment, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion. These outcomes carry substantial social and economic costs for all of us, straining social services, reducing the overall productivity of our workforce, and exacerbating inequities that threaten community cohesion.

A Call to Action

We must act now. TNGCS and other service providers across the city are ready and willing to meet this challenge, but we need the support of from all levels of governments to do so. We need sustained investment in youth employment programming that recognizes the urgency of this moment and the potential that lies in our city's young people. Together, we can ensure that youth—especially those from marginalized communities—are not left behind but are given the tools they need to build brighter futures for themselves and for our city.

Recognizing the City's Efforts

First, I want to acknowledge the City's long-standing commitment to supporting youth employment and economic development. Programs like YouthWorx, TDSB: Black Student Summer Leadership Program, City's Trainees Program, and Toronto Youth Job Corps have provided valuable opportunities for young people across our city, particularly those from priority neighbourhoods. However, we are here today because the vision for 2026 must go beyond what is already in place.

Ensuring New Opportunities

Our concern is that the 10,000 jobs being proposed may count existing jobs that the City already creates, without expanding the opportunities that Toronto's youth so desperately need. We urge this Committee to ensure that these 10,000 jobs are additional summer jobs—new opportunities that help address the chronic challenges facing Toronto's youth. Youth unemployment rates remain stubbornly high, and youth violence is an ongoing concern in our communities. Meaningful, well-paid employment can be a powerful tool to combat both.

Toronto's Opportunity for Leadership

There is an opportunity here for Toronto to show real leadership—not just in Ontario, but across the country. We know that other cities, particularly in the U.S., have successfully scaled up youth employment programs in collaboration with the private sector and other levels of government. Toronto can—and should—be a leader in doing the same.

The Need for Collaboration

The City cannot achieve this on its own. We need to see a robust effort to partner with the provincial and federal governments, as well as the private sector. Together, we can create a transformative youth employment program that provides real economic opportunity and, at the same time, helps tackle some of the root causes of violence and poverty in our city.

Thank you.