

Rep. Van Drew (NJ – 02) - LHHS Testimony

Good afternoon Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole. Thank you for providing this opportunity to testify before the Appropriations subcommittee of Labor, Health and Human Services.

I am here today to advocate for \$270,000 in Community Project Funding for the Jobs for America's Graduates New Jersey Program through the Employment and Training Services Account. This funding is an excellent use of taxpayer funds, having a direct and positive impact on the lives of underprivileged youth. Currently, NJ is the only state in the program not to receive state or federal money.

The Jobs for America's Graduates initiative, or JAG, has a 40-year track record of success in working with student populations that are at high risk of not completing their education.

JAG NJ targets New Jersey high school students and out-of-school youth who have at least five academic, environmental, physical, psychological or work-related barriers to success, and offers real-world learning experiences that demonstrate how staying in high school and earning a diploma can enhance their lives. Participating students typically struggle with low academic performance, low income, chronic absenteeism, and home lives that are not conducive to achieving educational goals.

JAG NJ is currently implemented in eleven programs across New Jersey, helping nearly 2,000 young adults since 2011 complete their education, leading to either a quality job after graduation and/or enrollment in postsecondary education and training programs on the way to a career.

This project has received exceptional community support, including letters of support from mayors, school districts, nonprofit organizations, and the New Jersey Department of Labor.

Community project funding will be used for:

- Training
- Laptops
- Student leadership conferences
- Rent, utilities, insurance
- Academic development training
- Most importantly: housing/shelter, referral services, medical attention, life skills training, intake, and meeting spaces.

The Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the challenges faced by students in the sorts of vulnerable populations that JAG services. Providing this funding will make a tremendous difference in the lives of underprivileged New Jersey students. I want to reiterate that JAG NJ is the only state in the 40-state program that receives no state or federal

funding. I urge the committee to provide this Community Project funding, thank you for your time.