

## CONGRESS MUST INVEST IN YOUTH WORKFORCE READINESS PROGRAMS

**About NSLA:** For 30 years, NSLA has worked to combat summer learning loss and close the achievement and opportunity gaps which research shows grows most dramatically between lower and higher income students over the summer months. Our vision is, and always has been, to ensure all young people in America, regardless of background, income, and zip-code, can participate in and benefit from a high-quality summer learning experience, every year. NSLA supports and collaborates with a broad and ever-growing network of 15,000+ leaders of school districts, youth serving government agencies, non-profit and corporate partners from across the country focused on improving the lives of youth. At the federal level, our priorities include: robust funding for a wide array of programs that support summer enrichment, youth workforce development, and access to healthy nutrition via summer meals.

**Background:** America's young people face an ever-changing labor market and an uncertain educational outlook. While COVID has severely impacted the country's progress in youth workforce development, most available programs are still mostly aimed at older youth, missing a critical window of essential skill development. Congressional support for the youth workforce would expand access to programs and experiences that help youth explore their interests, develop their skills and apply their knowledge to real-world work experience.

### What Can Congress Do to Support the Youth Workforce?

**Introduce and Enact the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):** WIOA, would expand access to high-quality job training, career navigation services, and other critical services, including investments in youth workforce development programs. WIOA would reauthorize and strengthen our nation's workforce development system by:

- Expanding summer and year-round jobs programs for youth;
- Codifying partnerships between employers and summer programs to provide high-quality job training;
- Strengthening industry and sector partnerships to better meet the needs of both employers and job seekers; and
- Providing funding for innovative approaches to workforce development.

**Cosponsor the Youth Workforce Readiness Act:** We ask Congress to co-sponsor the Youth Workforce Readiness Act ([H.R.2910](https://www.congress.gov/bills/116/2910)) and support its passage as part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act reauthorization. The Youth Workforce Readiness Act of 2025 would establish a competitive grant through the Department of Labor's Employment & Training Administration for national out-of-school time organizations to support local youth-serving

affiliates that provide programs focused on four pillars that support youth workforce readiness: essential skill development (ages 6-18), career exposure (ages 6-18), employability and certification (ages 13-18), and work-based learning (ages 15-18).

**Pay Congressional Interns a Living Wage:** In order to build a more diverse and representative government for all people, Congress must ensure that individuals, especially the most underserved, are represented in the spaces which impact their communities. This can be achieved by giving youth from underserved communities a chance at working in government and paying interns. Non-paid internships have widened the equity gap between people of color and groups with low socio-economic backgrounds and prevented these youth from obtaining the opportunities to represent their communities on Capitol Hill. According to a [2025 report from the Congressional Research Service](#), the *Members' Handbook* states that the pay rate for interns is “no less than \$1,200 annually”. While some offices may pay their interns above the minimum requirements, this low pay rate threshold excludes youth who cannot afford to assume additional cost of living expenses during their internship. In order to diversify Capitol Hill and ensure underrepresented youth have these important opportunities to work in our government, NSLA respectfully requests Congress include funds in their administrative budgets to pay Congressional interns a living wage.

**NSLA's Paid Policy Internship Program:** In order to provide students of color with opportunities on Capitol Hill and the Administration, NSLA offers a financially supported internship program during the summer months. This summer, NSLA recruited, trained, and placed 8 college interns of color, from our award winning summer programs, in Senate and nonprofit offices. NSLA provided them with a \$4,000 cash stipend, \$750 for a professional wardrobe, fully paid housing, and covered all travel expenses. All of our students demonstrate a track record of leadership, policy, and public service. Throughout the summer, interns participated in weekly evening leadership, mentoring, and networking sessions and extensive professional development after their work in the Hill offices. In 2026, NSLA hopes to expand this to more college students in the years to come.

For any questions or follow up, please contact NSLA's Policy & Advocacy expert, Ally Talcott, at [ally.talcott@alliedforprogress.com](mailto:ally.talcott@alliedforprogress.com).