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Summer employment for WMass teens

Sunday, March 22, 2009

By MARTHA COAKLEY

Idon't need to tell you that these are tough times economically. Just last month the Federal Reserve revised its economic outlook for the first half of 2009, stating that it expects the economy to shrink and unemployment to continue to rise. And according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, over the past 12 months, the number of unemployed nationally has increased by 4.1 million and the unemployment rate has risen by 2.7 percent.

Unemployment has had a disproportionate impact on young people in our state. The percentage of Massachusetts teens who are employed has declined from 53 percent in 1999 to 39 percent in 2007. This is the highest unemployment rate for teens since immediately following the end of World War II.

Last summer, our office was pleased to partner with the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County to assist in the board's efforts to provide summer employment opportunities to teenagers throughout Greater Springfield. Thanks to the work of your Regional Employment Board, youth employment in Greater Springfield increased from 794 jobs in 2007 to 956 jobs in 2008. We are pleased to again partner with the Regional Employment Board and hope area employers will support this year's campaign to help more young people in Hampden County to find jobs this summer.

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Many of us look back with pride about our own part-time and summer employment as teenagers. These jobs provided us not only with some extra income, but perhaps more importantly, they also provided us the chance to gain valuable job skills, to learn from adult mentors, and to gain a sense of responsibility, independence and self confidence. Our young adults need these opportunities more now than ever. I would like to encourage all employers to consider whether they might be able to offer one or more job opportunities to local youth this summer. Alternatively, if they are not able to offer jobs, they can support the Regional Employment Board through a donation, which will be used to support wages for youth employment.

Martha Coakley is attorney general of Massachusetts.

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