



## The Republican.

### Summer teen jobs program gets \$767,000 in state funds

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By **JIM KINNEY**  
Business writer

SPRINGFIELD - A program that helps at-risk Hampden County teens get summer jobs is getting \$767,000 in state funding this year, \$219,000 more than last year.

Kathryn A. Kirby, youth employment coordinator at the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County Inc., said the additional money will fund summer jobs for about 400 teens compared with the 320 teens who participated in 2007.

The problem is, last year the YouthWorks program received about 800 applications for the jobs.

"So you see the need right now," Kirby said.

The Regional Employment Board of Hampden County is hosting an Employer Outreach Breakfast from 7:30 to 9 a.m. Friday at the TD BankNorth Conference Center at 1441 Main St.

Kirby said the breakfast is a way to pitch the program to employers, a group that includes some for-profit companies but is mostly nonprofits like the YMCA, she said. She'll try to stretch those state dollars.

"What we do is we'll try and cut deals - 'If you hire one young person and pay their salary, we'll give you two people that we fund,'" Kirby said.

To participate, teens ages 14 to 21 have to be income eligible and meet at least one of eight other criteria. One of the eight can be that they are children of a single parent who works, Kirby said.

Many teens run into problems looking for work because managers look for older teens. For instance, someone has to be 18 to run a floor buffer or a meat slicer in a deli. It makes things tough on the younger teens, she said.

Jaensha M. Torres, 19, of Springfield, has worked at UMass Extension in Springfield since she was 15.

"It was great experience," she said. "I did clerical work, helped with programming, picked up the phones. I learned customer service."

She's now a full-time student at Springfield Technical Community College and has job outside the program as a sales clerk at a store.

Janice A. Healy, chief of the attorney general's Western Massachusetts Division will speak at the breakfast Friday on the importance of hiring youth.

The attorney general's office has a Youth Employment Opportunities Initiative that is focusing on Springfield, Boston, New Bedford and Worcester. The idea is that getting young people employed prevents crime by getting them off the streets and giving them some spending money, according to a news release

from the Attorney General's Office.

Teens in the program earn \$8 an hour and work 16 to 20 hours a week over 10 weeks, Kirby said.

Springfield youth in interested in the program are asked to contact Janice Watson at the Massachusetts Career Development Institute at (413) 781-5640, ext. 217 or 279.

Young people in Holyoke should contact Jennifer Perez at (413) 322-5510.

A separate year-round youth employment program funded with federal money through the Workforce Investment Act, which provides about 200 jobs, is expected to receive \$1.2 million for this year, Kirby said. That is the same amount the federal program received last year.

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