

Andrew Wells – Chicago Urban League Director of Workforce Development

**Testimony of Andrew Wells
Congress of the United States | U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources**

**Jobs and Opportunities: Local Perspectives on Jobs Gap
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To the Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources- my name is Andrew Wells, and I am the Director of the Workforce Development Center at the Chicago Urban League. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony here today.

In my role at the Chicago Urban League, I am tasked with the very important job of connecting people to employment opportunities. In the 100 years our organization has been in service to the African American community, this has been a staple of our work.

Employment is the most essential building block in individual and community economic growth. A good job helps to alleviate household poverty, and a strong job market gets more people in a community working and more dollars circulating locally and nationally. The Chicago Urban League focuses specifically on assisting individuals in the highest areas of need, in racially concentrated areas of poverty, the areas that have the highest unemployment rates in the city - located primarily on the South and West sides of Chicago.

Youth and adults living in racially concentrated areas of poverty, however, have a significant number of barriers to accessing jobs.

1. There is a significant employment spatial mismatch – Strong central business districts and suburban employment cores house many of the best opportunities for workers. In places like Chicago, where jobs are located are not where African Americans most in need of jobs live. Someone who doesn't live near transportation – or who lacks a car - might have a very difficult time getting to work. The distance might be too considerable to manage working, child and household obligations. The pay may not be adequate to overcome increased costs related to commute and child care. All of these barriers conspire to reduce a person's ability to both find and keep a good job.
2. The collateral consequences of criminal records significantly impede employment opportunities. We know that employment is a critical part of the re-entry process, and yet there are barriers at all levels of hiring and promotion, throughout all industries and sectors.
3. Skills, job readiness and training programs *need to be more abundant*. These skills need to be targeted in areas of growth, like green and emerging industries.

The Chicago Urban League strongly encourages more training opportunities for men and women - for youth and adults - from the most disadvantaged neighborhoods to build on their employability skills. But that is not the only answer; we also need to do the following:

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1. Enact an employment subsidy program which would place unemployed individuals in the private and public sectors, including those with criminal records.
2. Expand apprenticeship, summer and other employment opportunity programs for youth.
3. Increase workforce training opportunities for African American adults and match them with employment (through public private partnerships).
4. Reduce the collateral consequences of a criminal record and barriers to employment through sound criminal justice reforms. Create or expand transportation subsidies to ensure that workers can get to their places of employment
5. Create small business incubators in racially concentrated areas of poverty to bring local, accessible jobs to these disinvested communities.
6. Ensure equity in public education. Illinois has the worst disparities for funding in that nation when it comes to equity for low-income minority students. Providing youth with good quality education will go a long way towards improving access to quality jobs by preparing youth to get jobs.

I know that this will not be easy. I know this takes political and community will to accomplish. But we all know how crucial increasing employment opportunities are to our neighborhoods and to cities across the country. Expanding these opportunities will not only increase employment in our most under-resourced communities, but will also reduce crime, decrease household poverty, increase home ownership and build community wealth. We cannot continue to accept that in great cities like Chicago, the highest unemployment rate for people of color in the nation is the norm! We must do what's right to ensure equal access to opportunity for all American citizens.

Thank you.