

January 30, 2017



Panel Tackles Youth Unemployment, Chicago Violence

By Leah Hope



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CHICAGO (WLS) -- Jobs are the solution to the gun violence problem in Chicago, according to many of the city's community leaders. Many of those leaders gathered young people and employers to discuss the problem on Monday.

"I'm not Martin Luther King, not at all. But I have a dream," said Madre Morson, an Innovation High School student.

The Youth Employment Hearing hosted by Chicago Urban League reveals as violence in Chicago has increased, so has youth unemployment.

"The underground economy that has grown into these neighborhoods right now is one way for them to do that. And that's unfortunate," said Shari Runner, president, Chicago Urban League.

Some young people share their personal challenges trying to find jobs.

"Being with the wrong friends led me to going to juvenile detention centers, to the county jail, to gaining a criminal background, to not being able to finding employment. And it just made it hard," participant Mari Rivera said.

"You lose friends every day, it means a lot to you. But for us to have a job, it gives us the opportunity to stay off the street, gives us the opportunity to learn work ethic, responsibility, be independent," participant Everett Spraggs said.

Employers in the audience were urged to consider more young, urban applicants and lawmakers were urged get more funding to

agencies that support young people getting on track.

"These programs guarantee a gateway for us, for not only in the working field and experience in it, yet the gateway to have fellowship with others, connections, individual growth and skills that will last a lifetime," said Alleny Pena.

"Now let's see how many of us will provide jobs for the youth so there won't be another suspect to these streets," Morson said in a spoken word poem.

The employers at the forum said the young people they have taken on have been the most loyal and focused because the young employees know what's at stake.