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Connecticut youth employment program expands by $2 million

Officials hope for an increase of jobs with community health organizations

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Mark Hill, the interim CEO and president of the Eastern Workforce Investment Board, or EWIB, believes it's important to support youth employment during this challenging time.

"There's a lot of need in the community for cleaning and sanitation, with the effects related to COVID," he said. "A lot of community hospitals have expressed a need."

Gov. Ned Lamont expanded the Connecticut Youth Employment Program by $2 million earlier this week, according to a press release. The program, run by the Connecticut Department of Labor, will have $7.1 million in total funding this year.

Officials hope the expansion will lead to an increase in jobs with community health organizations that serve marginalized populations affected by the virus, including communities

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of color.

"Increasing our investment in youth employment programs not only helps our young people, but will also make a difference for community health," Lamont said in the release.

For EWIB, its share will go to the Summer Youth Employment Program. On a normal year, the program is able to employ up to 450 youths in their teens and early 20s in nonprofits in the area. These youths work for a period of six weeks, and are paid minimum wage from program funds, collected through public and private funds.

Hill said the job skills are just as important as the job itself.

"It's their first career opportunity, so it lets them build the skills that (we) take for granted," he said. "We've got be at work on time, you've got a certain amount of hours you've got to put in, you've got to work hard."

Hill believes this money will let EWIB give more jobs for this summer, but he isn't sure yet how big of an increase there will be.

"There are always kids who try to sign up late, but they can't get in," he said. "So, this money is really important because it helps us expand the program to more kids, and create more opportunities for them

One organization that helps EWIB with it's Summer Youth Employment Program is EASTCONN, an education non-profit. Cyndi Wells, EASTCONN's youth coordinator for employment and training, said the participants in the program also receive other benefits from participation, like job training and financial planning.

"More money means we get to serve more youth, and they get to have a learning experience," she said.

The job placement from these programs also considers prior experience. Wells said someone with a certified nursing assistant background would be connected to a provider in the area.

Wells, like Hill, believes it's important for there to be more support of youth employment.

"They have some great ideas, some great skill sets, and some great energy that they're really able to exemplify out in the community and contribute," she said.

Did you know

The Connecticut Youth Employment Program had received $4.5 million at the start of this year. It received $637,600 from the Youth Employment and Training Collaboration, run by the Connecticut Department of Labor and the Connecticut Department of Children and Families.