

WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SMALL
BUSINESS

AVENUES TO SUCCESS: EXAMING WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR EMPLOYEES

September 25, 2024

Ashley Gamba

Executive Director, Community Options New York, Inc

Dear Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velazquez and Members of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business:

As an Executive Director for Community Options New York Inc, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide written testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Small Business regarding workforce training programs that are available to help small business owners expand their labor pool.

Community Options, Inc. is a nationally based nonprofit (IRS 501(c)(3) certified) organization incorporated in 1989 and headquartered in Princeton, NJ. Community Options believes in the dignity of every person, and in the freedom of all people to experience the highest degree of self-determination. Embracing this philosophy, Community Options provides housing and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Over the past year we supported over 5,000 people with disabilities, including 2,100 people receiving employment services, assisting them with developing the skills needed to obtain and maintain competitive, integrated employment.

Community Options, Inc has had the opportunity to develop innovative training programs in partnership with numerous businesses to assist with positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities across New York State. We have partnered with Legends at Yankee Stadium to provide hands-on integrated training in the following areas: Merchandising, Food Service, Customer Service and Retail. By providing work readiness training to assist participants with building the soft skills related to employment, hands-on experience to develop transferrable work skills, and onsite training and support, we have successfully placed over 200 individuals in paid work experiences that have resulted in 80% of placement in competitive employment settings.

Additionally, through a partnership with the NBA Foundation, Community Options has received funding to provide training and employment support to minority youth with disabilities across several states. This funding has enabled us to identify youth with disabilities and provide work readiness training, career exploration counseling, job placement, and job coaching services to this population. This couldn't be done without our small business partners; local businesses and organizations that have assisted with allowing us the opportunity to provide onsite training and job coaching services to the individuals that we support.

Most recently, we have had the opportunity to partner with CVS Health to provide retail, front/back store, supervisor training, and a Department of Labor funded pre-apprenticeship program for

Weston, B. (n.d.). Small businesses persevere despite hiring challenges. SCORE. <https://www.score.org/resource/blog-post/small-businesses-persevere-despite-hiring-challenges>

SHRM. (2023, December 12). SHRM Foundation, Entertainment Industry Foundation launch Partnership Promoting Inclusion in the Workplace. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/about/press-room/shrm-foundation-entertainment-industry-foundation-launch-partnership-promoting-inclusion-workplace>

Pharmacy Technician Training. Through this partnership, we have had the opportunity to build a career readiness center offering hands-on training to further develop the transferable work skills required for competitive employment.

In our ever-evolving economy it has become apparent that hiring to meet the needs of many small businesses has proven to be difficult. In a recent survey conducted by SCORE, more than 50% of small businesses reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to fill open positions citing that it has been most problematic to find skilled or qualified workers. Additionally, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, approximately 97% of HR professionals and 92% of people managers say that employees with disabilities often perform at the same or better level than their coworkers without disabilities. Yet, this population often faces significant challenges when attempting to obtain meaningful employment.

As always, we are very thankful for our small business partners who work closely with our agency to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We encourage small businesses across the country to partner with local agencies to increase the availability and accessibility to training programs designed to train and develop the skills of this under-represented population. And we also urge congress to continue to strengthen funding for vocational and pre-apprenticeship opportunities for both youth and adults with disabilities.

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