

**Testimony of Tracee Hunt**  
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**Philadelphia City Council**  
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Madame Chair and Members of the Philadelphia City Council, my name is Tracee Hunt. I am Vice President for Human Resources at the Philadelphia Coca-Cola Bottling Company, and I currently serve as Chair of the Philadelphia Youth Council. The Youth Council is mandated by the federal Workforce Investment Act as a subgroup of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, and makes recommendations on the allocation and expenditure of approximately \$10 million in youth workforce development funding each year.

The Youth Council has two primary initiatives: WorkReady Philadelphia – the City’s system to coordinate existing youth workforce programming and to expand the overall number of high-quality workplace experiences; and Project U-Turn – a citywide effort led by the Youth Transitions Collaborative to resolve Philadelphia’s dropout crisis. Both of these initiatives focus squarely on preparing Philadelphia youth to become our City and region’s highly skilled workforce of the future.

Like my colleague Pamela Crawley, whom I succeeded as Youth Council Chair, I strongly believe that our young people are the keys to our City's social and economic success. As Youth Council chair, and as an employer of young people through WorkReady Philadelphia, I have had the opportunity to see the potential of our young people, and to observe first-hand the absolute importance of providing high-quality opportunities that enable them to apply their academic learning to real-world workplace experience.

I'm proud that the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and its Youth Council are recognized as national leaders in providing these types of high-quality workplace experiences. But despite these efforts, each year we are forced to turn away as many as 3,000 young people who seek high-quality workplace internships, but for whom positions are not available due to a lack of resources. Furthermore, this situation is likely to be exacerbated beginning this coming summer, due to the recently-enacted changes in the minimum wage law. While the minimum wage increase is welcome for thousands of Philadelphia workers and families, the additional costs it represents will cause a significant reduction in the number of available internships, which will force us to turn away even more eager and talented

young people this summer. In fact, we could lose between 1,200 and 1,700 employment opportunities for youth this year.

We know that these workplace experiences are extremely important for our youth, offering the potential to increase academic performance by demonstrating how learning is relevant to careers, and also by providing high-quality work experiences that can result in higher earnings in the future. But also research tells us that low-income urban youth have less access to these valuable workplace experiences than their more affluent suburban peers.

We also know that these young people have the talent to succeed. They are all around us – working hard to overcome barriers and striving to get the skills they need. Some are still in classrooms moving towards graduation, postsecondary education and careers. Others, who left school without a diploma, are now trying to re-connect to learning opportunities because they realize that education is the key to economic self-sufficiency.

As an employer, I can tell you that our City and its economy desperately need young people who are preparing themselves to become the Greater Philadelphia region's highly skilled 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. You will have opportunities to meet several of these young people here this morning. And

in fact, there are thousands more all across this City who are working hard to prepare themselves for the future.

There is plenty of opportunity for such young people. But most will need a helping hand to turn their lives around – and to become the active and productive citizens we want and need them to be.

Workplace internships can provide the kind of transformational experience that makes education relevant, and brings young people in contact with caring adults who can guide and mentor them. So, while we are working to build high-quality learning opportunities for more of our young people, we should also provide workplace opportunities that give form and substance to their academic work.

For these reasons, I urge Council to support workplace internships for our young people. Our request would offset the loss of slots associated with minimum wage increases and also expand the number of available opportunities, enabling us both to reduce our waiting lists and also to dedicate internships to the vulnerable young people returning to School District diploma-granting programs as a part of a continuum of services designed to maximize their chances for success.

Thank you, again, Madame Chair and Council Members, for the opportunity to present testimony this morning on such an important topic. I look

forward to working with you to create new opportunities for our young people.