



March 28, 2009

Chairman Jim Dunnam
Select Committee on Federal Economic Stabilization Funding
Texas House of Representatives
Texas Capitol Room E2.202
Post Office Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Dear Chairman Dunnam,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before the Select Committee on Saturday, March 21, 2009 in San Antonio. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before the Select Committee about the needs of San Antonio's urban youth and the difficulties agencies such as ours have faced in this economy.

San Antonio Youth Centers (SAYC) is a 25-year-old nonprofit community-based organization that has dramatically impacted the lives of 20,000-plus high-risk urban youth since our humble beginnings in 1984. Focusing on preventing children from dropping out of school and recapturing high school drop-outs in San Antonio, SAYC's vision is that each young person who walks through our doors will exit with the tools necessary for lifelong success.

Cities in Crisis, a report released by America's Promise Alliance on April 1, 2008 finds that America's largest cities struggle to keep our children in school. This is certainly the case in San Antonio, Texas. Nationally, roughly 70% of students graduate on time with a regular diploma. Studies released by researchers at Johns Hopkins University released a national report identifying 185 Texas high schools with attrition rates of at least 40 percent, which they labeled "dropout factories." San Antonio had 15 of these high schools. As you can see, innovative programs such as the San Antonio Youth Centers, preventing our children from dropping out and recovering high school drop-outs, are more critical than ever.

SAYC programs for urban youth address these issues by providing:

- **Community Learning Centers** – throughout San Antonio. In seven neighborhood learning centers, we keep children ages 5 to 18 out-of-trouble during the peak periods for juvenile crime and delinquency and keep them engaged in learning year-round (after school, weekends, and summer—periods cited by the National Council on Juvenile Crime and Delinquency as the most critical period for children because they go unsupervised and are least likely to be learning during this time). SAYC provides learning, enrichment activities, reading and literacy, tutoring, meals, computer training, art and music, and more.
 - These programs are also vitally important to the working poor. Our centers are free of charge and serve families earning, on average, less than \$15,000 a year. By providing FREE safe places, caring adults and learning opportunities for children who might otherwise be left to fend for themselves, we are supporting the needs of families by ensuring their children are safe and supervised year round when they may have no other alternative. The centers support the needs of the working poor by opening our doors five hours a day during the school year and nine hours a day during the long summer months.
- **YouthBuild** – for young adults ages 16 to 24 who have already dropped out of school, YouthBuild provides education and workforce training, a second chance in life. Our YouthBuild program fulfills four primary goals: 1) developing economic self-sufficiency; 2) encouraging youth to continue a formal education or apprenticeship; 3)

engaging youth in a lifelong learning process; and 4) developing leadership competencies. While in YouthBuild, participants rehabilitate run-down homes in our community for low-income first-time homebuyers.

- o Opportunities are minimal for students who are 16 to 24 who have been out of school for some period. Our YouthBuild ConstructionCorps prepares students for a real trade and offers them a chance to seek further study in homebuilding at the college level. Offering a dual credit program with Alamo Community College District gives students a sense of motivation to enter college or continue study long after our program ends...as they have already taken that "first step" toward achievement of a higher education.

Results: Last year, 100% of the children at four of the seven community learning centers we operate passed the state's TAKS test. In addition, 80% of the young adults we served in our YouthBuild program completed the program and finished their GEDs.

As you look at where to invest stimulus dollars in San Antonio, we urge you to invest in the children. Children, especially low-income children, need our support more than ever. Nonprofit organizations, particularly children's charities, are critically at-risk of closing doors as corporate, foundation and individual support shrink. A recent article in Philanthropy News Now, *America's Nonprofits in Danger*, starts out:

America's nonprofits, including the "lifeline" organizations that many depend on for food, shelter, and other basic services, are strained to the breaking point, according to a survey released today by Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF). The survey of 986 nonprofit leaders in markets nationwide captures the financial state and particular challenges facing these organizations.

The article continues,

Nonprofits are taking steps to weather the recession that range from cuts to essential programs to layoffs. When asked to identify actions taken within the past 12 months or planned for the next 12 months: 39% identified "reduce or eliminate programs"; 41% identified "reduce staff or salaries"; and 23% identified "delay payments to vendors."

Stimulus funding provides a critical gap in funding for nonprofit organizations that are providing important community services in San Antonio. We recommend that stimulus funding be invested in our children and youth for after school learning programs, extended learning opportunities, for youth summer employment programs, for programs that improve educational outcomes, and for programs that train youth for the workforce. We further ask that competitive guidelines and applications be issued so agencies can compete for funds based on the merits of these programs.

In addition, San Antonio Youth Centers has one shovel-ready construction project to construct a **Southside Youth and Family Center** on the Southside of our city. Should stimulus funding be made available, we could begin constructing the 40,000 square foot facility within 90 days. SAYC has held off on our fund-raising efforts and construction plans because of current economic conditions. The facility would provide services to children, youth and families year round. The cost of construction the facility is \$5.1 million.

Thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to speak at the hearing last weekend.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Le Monds
Chief Executive Officer
San Antonio Youth Centers (SAYC)

cc: Committee members, San Antonio City Council, Mayor Phil Hardberger