

Title: Addressing the Opportunity Youth Demographic: Expanding Tuition Waivers for Apprenticeship Programs – Commissioner Randy Burns, Burke County – Chair of NCACC Public Education Steering Committee

Introduction:

MyfutureNC has set ambitious goals for education and workforce development by 2030, aiming to ensure North Carolina's economic prosperity and competitiveness. However, solely focusing on current high school students may not be sufficient, as they are not within the immediate timeframe to impact these goals. In this paper, we argue for the necessity of addressing the opportunity youth demographic, aged 19-24, as a crucial step towards achieving MyfutureNC objectives. Additionally, we emphasize the importance of expanding tuition waivers for young adults to participate in apprenticeship programs up until their 25th birthday.

Understanding the Opportunity Youth Demographic:

The term "opportunity youth" refers to young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor employed. This demographic faces significant challenges, including limited access to education, training, and employment opportunities, which hinder their ability to contribute meaningfully to the economy and society. While some may have dropped out of high school, others may have graduated but struggle to transition into higher education or secure stable employment.

Importance of Expanding Tuition Waivers for Apprenticeship Programs:

Expanding tuition waivers for young adults to participate in apprenticeship programs up until their 25th birthday is essential for several reasons:

1. **Access to Skill Development:** Apprenticeship programs offer valuable opportunities for hands-on skill development and on-the-job training, which are essential for preparing young adults for the workforce. By expanding tuition waivers, more opportunity youth can access these programs and acquire in-demand skills, enhancing their employability and economic prospects.
2. **Financial Barrier Mitigation:** Cost can be a significant barrier preventing young adults from participating in apprenticeship programs. Expanding tuition waivers helps alleviate this financial burden, making apprenticeships more accessible to those from low-income backgrounds or underserved communities.
3. **Extended Support Period:** Many opportunity youth may require additional time and support to overcome educational and employment barriers. Extending tuition waivers up until their 25th birthday provides these young adults with an extended period to access apprenticeship opportunities and receive the necessary training and support to succeed in the workforce.

Strategies for Implementation:

To effectively expand tuition waivers for apprenticeship programs, the following strategies can be implemented:

1. **Legislative Action:** State policymakers can enact legislation or expand existing programs to extend tuition waivers for young adults participating in apprenticeship programs until their 25th birthday.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with employers, industry associations, and educational institutions to develop and fund tuition waiver programs for apprenticeship participants.
3. **Outreach and Awareness:** Raise awareness among opportunity youth about the availability of tuition waivers for apprenticeship programs through targeted outreach campaigns, community partnerships, and online resources.
4. **Support Services:** Provide comprehensive support services, including career counseling, mentorship, and financial assistance, to help young adults navigate the apprenticeship application process and succeed in their chosen career paths.

Conclusion:

Expanding tuition waivers for young adults to participate in apprenticeship programs up until their 25th birthday is a crucial step in addressing the needs of the opportunity youth demographic and achieving MyfutureNC goals by 2030. By removing financial barriers and providing access to skill development opportunities, we can empower these young adults to realize their potential, contribute to the workforce, and drive North Carolina's economic prosperity and competitiveness.