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How States Can Streamline the Hiring Process for Teenage Workers and Restore Decision-Making to Parents

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KEY FINDINGS



PARENTS, NOT SCHOOLS, SHOULD HAVE
DECISION-MAKING POWER OVER WHETHER
THEIR CHILDREN GET A JOB.



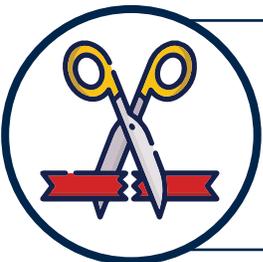
YOUTH WORK PERMITS ARE
NOT REQUIRED BY FEDERAL LAW.



SOME STATES HAVE CREATED UNNECESSARY
HURDLES TO TEENAGE EMPLOYMENT BY
REQUIRING YOUTH WORK PERMITS.



TEENAGERS ARE A CRITICAL SOURCE OF LABOR
FOR BUSINESSES STRUGGLING TO FIND HELP.



WITH A NATIONAL LABOR CRISIS AND
TEENAGERS OPTING TO JOIN THE WORKFORCE AT
RECORD-HIGH RATES, CUTTING BUREAUCRATIC
RED TAPE CAN HELP STABILIZE THE ECONOMY.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

STATES SHOULD RESTORE DECISION-MAKING TO PARENTS BY
ELIMINATING YOUTH WORK PERMITS.

Background

Working a part-time job during high school is an opportunity that every American teenager should be afforded. By holding a job, teenagers learn invaluable life lessons like responsibility, time management, and personal finance. And the decision to get a first job should start with a conversation between teenagers and their parents. But many states have created an unnecessary hurdle in which teenagers need to obtain a work permit from their school before getting a job—effectively leaving the decision to school administrators.

A youth work permit is a document that certifies a teenager’s eligibility to work. In states that require youth work permits, teenagers are responsible for obtaining permits while employers retain a copy on file. Though some state labor departments issue youth work permits, they are typically issued by school districts.¹ **To obtain a work permit, a teenager must receive permission to work from a designated officer tasked with reviewing the occupation, working hours, and employer information.** Depending on state policy, administrators may require a physical examination from a doctor or unilaterally determine the occupation is not in the best interest of the child.



With the increased pressure from parents seeking to reform the influence schools have over their children’s lives, eliminating needless bureaucratic oversight is imperative.



Parents across the country are displeased with schools making these types of decisions for their children. In response to COVID-19-related policies and the inconsistent curriculum being taught at their children’s schools, parents have engaged in passionate debates at board meetings, participated in protests, and even sued their local school systems.²⁻⁷

With the increased pressure from parents seeking to reform the influence schools have over their children’s lives, eliminating needless bureaucratic oversight is imperative. **Now is the time for state lawmakers to eliminate unnecessary hurdles to teenage work and leave the decision-making to parents.**

Youth work permits are not required by federal law

Federal child labor laws were first created under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to ensure that children were protected by certain safety and health provisions.⁸ Regulations and restrictions were designed so that children (under the age of 18) could participate in employment without jeopardizing their well-being or education.

These federal standards include age requirements, wages, and maximum hours of work.⁹ For example, working hours for teenagers are capped and adjusted around certain periods of the school year—so high-school-aged students can focus on their education.¹⁰ And employers are

prohibited from employing a minor in a particularly hazardous job, like mining.¹¹ Additionally, employers are required to keep a record of a teenager’s birth date on file.¹² Employers subject to both the FLSA and state law must adhere to whichever is more protective of minors.

Unlike some state laws, teenagers are not required under federal law to obtain a work permit from their schools as a precondition of seeking employment. Standards regulating a child’s safety and well-being make sense, but state-created requirements forcing schools to get involved with family matters do not.

Teenagers want to work, so *let them*

The national labor crisis has created a standstill on the American economy and supply chains.¹³⁻¹⁴ With 6.3 million people unemployed and nearly 11 million available jobs, job openings exist across industries—from food services and hospitality to childcare and education.¹⁵⁻¹⁶ **Businesses in each of these industries are struggling to find suitable workers.**¹⁷

While millions of adults would rather stay home rather than work, teenagers across the country are joining the workforce.¹⁸⁻¹⁹ In fact, teenagers are seeking to join the workforce at one of the highest rates in modern history.²⁰⁻²¹

For example, in the summer of 2021, the unemployment rate for teenagers aged 16 to 19 remained below 10 percent for three months.²² The unemployment rate for teenagers had not been lower since 1953, when it was 8.6 percent.²³ Indeed, in the early summer of 2021, more than 32 percent of teenagers were employed—a record high that had been previously held in 2008.²⁴⁻²⁵

“
Teenagers are seeking to join the workforce at one of the highest rates in modern history.
”



Teenagers are a critical source of labor for businesses struggling to find help

Businesses across the country are seeking workers and offering incentives to attract teenage employees. For example, Walmart offers free college prep courses and college credits to its high school employees.²⁶⁻²⁷ And Publix Super Markets touts that one-third of all their store managers began working for the supermarket chain as teenagers.²⁸

Xplore Lakeside, a restaurant located in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, decided to pay their high-school-aged employees an extra hour to complete their homework.²⁹ This trend has been utilized across the nation, including in Saratoga Springs, New York at Hattie’s Restaurant—the owner implemented “Hattie’s Homework Hour” for teenage workers in each after school shift.³⁰ Texas-based Layne’s Chicken Fingers’ biggest challenge is the labor force, but they have been able to advance teenage workers to higher paid positions with potential for future growth.³¹

There are many advantages for teenage workers joining the workforce right now, but unnecessary bureaucratic oversight could delay or prevent them from seeking these opportunities.

States can help solve the labor shortage by modernizing work

Businesses are looking for workers and policymakers are looking for solutions. The solution, however, is not hard to find: **Remove unnecessary red tape by allowing teenagers to decide, with their parents, to get a job without needing school permission.**

Some pro-work states already recognize the importance of allowing teenagers to join the workforce and respect parents’ decision-making rights. These states include Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Tennessee, Texas, and more.³² Most recently, Indiana reformed its state laws to eliminate youth work permits in 2020.³³

But unsurprisingly, states that delay the hiring process for teenage workers include California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York, among others.³⁴ These states disregard parental decision-making by forcing schools into the equation. This only further complicates the employment process for teenagers.

For example, in Michigan, a teenager must obtain a new work permit from their school each time they change jobs.³⁵ Michigan teenagers even need school permission to perform summer work and unpaid volunteer opportunities.³⁶ In Ohio, teenagers must provide a physician’s certificate asserting that they are “physically fit to be employed.”³⁷ And Pennsylvania requires minors that have already graduated high school to get a work permit from their college or the school district where their employer is located.³⁸ This paperwork and verification process adds needless red tape and slows down the hiring process.



Teenagers must obtain a new work permit from their school **each time they change jobs** and they need school permission to perform summer work and **unpaid volunteer opportunities.**



Teenagers **must provide a physician’s certificate** asserting that they are “physically fit to be employed.”



High school graduates **must obtain a work permit from their college or the school district** where their employer is located.

Employers are already required to follow federal and state laws related to the health and safety of teenage employees. Creating an additional layer of bureaucracy does not make youth workers safer. Instead, it creates problems and delays for teenagers, their parents, and businesses attempting to hire new employees.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Lawmakers should restore decision making to parents by eliminating youth work permits.

When a state requires school approval for a teenager to work, schools can override parents. If the school refuses to issue a work permit, then a young person cannot work—even if a parent believes a job is in the best interest of their child.

Schools should not replace parents. Millions of teenagers want to join the workforce, and if their parents approve, then government should not have the ability to undermine their decision. It is time for state lawmakers to restore decision-making to parents and remove barriers for young Americans that want to work. Reforming work permit requirements will also streamline the hiring process for teenage workers.

State lawmakers can make a significant and immediate impact on their local communities and economies by eliminating youth work permits.

APPENDIX: DOES A TEENAGER UNDER 18 NEED TO GET GOVERNMENT PERMISSION TO WORK IN YOUR STATE?

State	Requires Government Permission
Alabama	●
Alaska	●
Arizona	NOT REQUIRED
Arkansas	●
California	●
Colorado	●
Connecticut	●
Delaware	●
Florida	NOT REQUIRED
Georgia	●
Hawaii	●
Idaho	NOT REQUIRED
Illinois	●
Indiana	NOT REQUIRED
Iowa	●
Kansas	NOT REQUIRED
Kentucky	NOT REQUIRED
Louisiana	●
Maine	●
Maryland	●
Massachusetts	●
Michigan	●
Minnesota	●
Mississippi	●
Missouri	●
Montana	NOT REQUIRED
Nebraska	●

State	Requires Government Permission
Nevada	NOT REQUIRED
New Hampshire	●
New Jersey	●
New Mexico	●
New York	●
North Carolina	●
North Dakota	●
Ohio	●
Oklahoma	●
Oregon	NOT REQUIRED
Pennsylvania	●
Rhode Island	●
South Carolina	NOT REQUIRED
South Dakota	NOT REQUIRED
Tennessee	NOT REQUIRED
Texas	NOT REQUIRED
Utah	NOT REQUIRED
Vermont	●
Virginia	●
Washington	●
West Virginia	●
Wisconsin	●
Wyoming	NOT REQUIRED

Source: U.S. Department of Labor

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