

Chelsea youth March to the State House to save youth jobs

SPECIAL TO THE CHELSEA RECORD

More than 700 youth, including a group of over 60 youth and adult allies from Chelsea, marched last week in the streets of Boston and rallied at the State House to encourage state leaders to fund more year-round and summer jobs for Massachusetts youth.

"It was an impressive display and the Chelsea participants articulated a powerful message," said Senator Sal DiDomenico, who was one of several legislative leaders to greet the group. "Their message is one I wholeheartedly endorse, so I'm grateful that they delivered their expressions in such great style and command."

The "Youth Jobs Rally" was organized by the Youth Jobs Coalition. With a rallying-cry emphasizing the great local importance of youth employment, particularly in the aftermath of the youth violence in Chelsea last year, representatives from the Chelsea Collaborative, the Chelsea REACH program, ROCA and the Jordan Boys and Girls Club hit the streets brandishing color signs and bellowing out chants. According to one of the local organizers, the importance of youth jobs is even higher in communities with larger immigrant populations, like Chelsea.

"We support our families with the money we earn. We help to pay the rent, pay for food and for other necessities of the house," said Camillo Cannacho, a youth leader from the Chelsea Collaborative.

The youth met with Gover-

nor Deval Patrick in a large assembly then visited their representatives individually. The group from Chelsea was so large that they could not fit in Senator DiDomenico's office and had to go to a larger meeting space to discuss their concerns. Although both Representatives Eugene O'Flaherty and Kathi Reinstein were not in the State House at the time, the group met with key staff members of the Chelsea legislators.

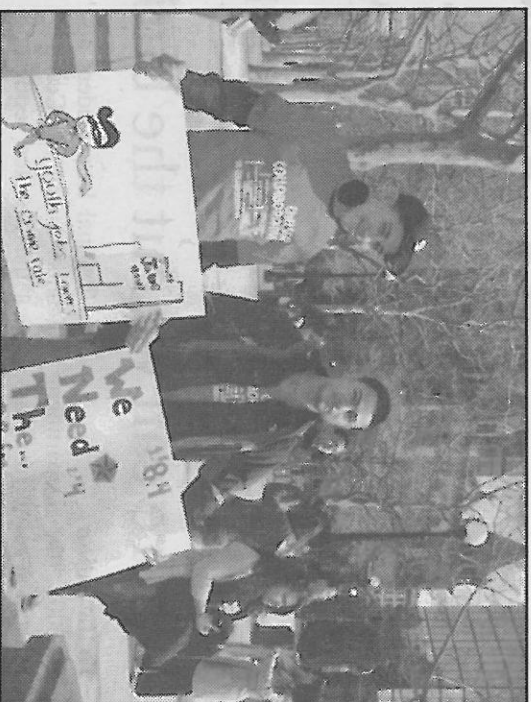
"This is an important issue, one that I stand behind and have worked tirelessly in the past to champion," reflected Rep. O'Flaherty when contacted. "Our youth are our future, and making sure they have the means to be gainfully employed and stay in constructive activities instead of just hanging on street corners is not only important for them, but important for our society as a whole."

The youth asked their legislators not to cut the Governor's budget line items (\$8.4 million for the Youth Works program and \$4.1 million for the School to Career Connecting Activities program). Both of these funding sources provide youth jobs for Chelsea Youth.

"And that message will be delivered," promised Rep. Reinstein. "Yes, times are tough, but our kids, especially our Chelsea kids, deserve every consideration we can afford them."

According to the youth organizers, the march and rally were a great success.

"This experience was very positive for me and I felt like I was marching for a very im-



Dennis Sanabria and Rogger Andrade were two of 60 Chelsea youth and their supporters who participated in last week's Youth Jobs Rally in Boston last week. Sanabria, Andrade and their fellow supporters met with Governor Deval Patrick and other State leaders to lobby for more summer jobs money for youth.

portant cause with my peers. I asked my representatives to include money in the budget so that there will be less youth in the streets and so that we have the opportunity to prepare ourselves for our future careers" said Jaymar Michel from the Chelsea REACH program.

Another youth leader, Alex Vega, also from the REACH program and participant in the Chelsea Collaborative Summer Youth Employment Initiative, said "it was fun yelling the chants in the streets. We want more funds this summer so that more Chelsea youth can have jobs."

Currently the Chelsea Collaborative is accepting applications for the Chelsea Summer Youth Employment Program. Any youth between the ages of 14 and 19 who is a Chelsea resident and who is eligible to work in the United States can apply for a summer

job at the Collaborative office at 318 Broadway. Because the need is so great, youth and their adult coordinators, hope their march leads to action.

"We're always challenged to secure enough funding for all of the youth who want to work. We usually receive 700 applications from youth for our summer program. Through a lottery system, we were only able to give jobs to 203 youth. For the 203, we are so happy. But for those that are so lucky, we all want to do more," said Kathleen Bray, a program coordinator at the Collaborative.

For more information on the Chelsea Summer Youth Employment Initiative, or to find out how to get more involved in the effort to provide jobs for local youth, interested persons can contact Bray at 617-889-6080 x 100 or kathleenb@chelseacollab.org.