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State funds boost YouthWorks program

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Gov. Martin O'Malley announced yesterday that state agencies employed more students than ever before as part of Baltimore's YouthWorks program, which gives students work experience and keeps them off the streets.

The state government's investment of about \$300,000 in the YouthWorks summer program allowed state agencies and offices to hire nearly 400 young men and women, including about 200 at the Department of Natural Resources. The state's participation helped Mayor Sheila Dixon fulfill her goal of not turning away anyone who applied to the program, which could not place about 1,200 youngsters last year.

In all, the program obtained jobs for more than 6,500 students, compared with about 5,400 last year. The students, ages 14 to 21, work 30 hours a week over six weeks, earning minimum wage.

"We not only create a better work force, but we also have a safer summer," O'Malley said of the program's benefits before having lunch with seven young women who worked at Mercy Medical Center this summer.

The \$5 million program has grown despite the loss of federal funding, city and state officials said. In addition to the state's contribution, more than 240 businesses hired youngsters or sponsored students to work in nonprofit or other organizations, which represented a fourfold increase in business participation.

Karen L. Sitnick, director of the city's office of employment development, said the earlier that children enter the work force, the more likely they are to get jobs later in life, and the more they are likely to earn.

Shaniqua Turner, a rising senior at Heritage High School, said she has experienced difficulty finding jobs in the city in the past and waited in a long line in May at the YouthWorks job fair at M&T Bank Stadium to talk to the Mercy Hospital recruiters.

She wants to become a doctor specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, and the experience solidified her resolve.



"Now that I look back, it was worth the wait," said Turner, who worked in medical records and patient transport.

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