



Formerly NHFA/VETTS

**Urban Community Alliance Testimony
State Of Connecticut Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget
DCF, CSSD, DSS
February 21, 2020**

Summary:

New Haven Family Alliance is extremely grateful for the incredible support and championing of our organization on behalf of several of this states' most inspiring and influential leaders. With your support for our organization we have been able to impact the lives of people of color within our hometown of New Haven. Countless youth, fathers, mothers, families, and veterans have directly or indirectly had their lives changed for the better because of the services we provide which have been graciously funded by the state of Connecticut through your guidance. We as an organization, believe it is time that we begin to empower and advance cities and towns across Connecticut with the same successful programs which have so greatly improved our New Haven community. This is why we have changed our name to Urban Community Alliance, as a beacon of hope to not only the New Haven community, but to communities all across Connecticut. With this new endeavor to expand and multiply our impact we seek additional support and your continued allyship so that we may better serve communities statewide. We thank you for your time and hope that you answer our call for support to better communities of color across the great state of Connecticut.

Request:

We are seeking for an additional \$500,000 to be allocated to our organization in order to expand our services across the state and help Connecticut's most vulnerable and historically neglected communities rise above poverty and seek opportunities they never once dreamt were possible.

Breakdown:

- \$100,000 - Male Involvement Network (DSS)
- \$50,000 - Juvenile Review Board (DCF)
- \$50,000 - Intensive Family Preservation (DCF)
- \$300,000 - Veterans Empowering Teens Through Support (CSSD)



Formerly NHFA/VETTS

Urban Community Alliance Testimony

State Of Connecticut Appropriations Committee

February 21, 2020

This testimony is in support of an increase in funding for the sustainability of nonprofits who support children, youth and families of color in urban communities. For over two years the NHFA Board of Directors, Vetts Board of Directors and senior management engaged in a process to determine the most prudent steps for the agency with the goal of sustainability. In August 2018 the New Haven Family Alliance entered into a Management Services Agreement (MSA) with Veterans Empowering Teens Through Support (VETTS). The MSA was the initial step in the merger between the NHFA and VETTS organizations. The merger was finalized on January 30, 2020 and the new organization Urban Community Alliance will continue to operate current programs related to both nonprofits. The merger will be publicly announced on February 28, 2020. In addition, NHFA will be undergoing a rebranding vision and strategy which will be revealed on the same day. The merging of the two non-profits will build a stronger brand and expand the outreach and capacity for providing supportive case management to children, youth, fathers, and families.

The impact of the children, youth, fathers, and families served 2018-2019 currently:

1. **Male Involvement Network:** Male Involvement Network provides supportive case management to low income, non-custodial, non-residential fathers. Fifty-nine (59) fathers were served during this period. Fathers continue to be able to access services through MIN's comprehensive intervention approach. MIN has identified 9 areas of intervention for the men/fathers served. These areas include outreach & case management, health, housing, legal advocacy, relationship building, employment, education, and mediation, access & visitation, and family and child support. One of the key values of MIN comprehensive approach to working with fathers is developing a relationship with them where other needs can be met through our extensive network of service providers focusing on nine core areas of the Fatherhood Engagement Strategic Plan. Fathers served have demonstrated increased time spent with their children, (47%) increased compliance with child support orders, (20%) increased employability, (42% of fathers completing the 24/7 DADs curriculum) enhancing parenting skills and (16% of fathers completing the 24/7 DADs curriculum as reflected in pre and post surveys).

The funding that supports Fatherhood involvement has decreased over the years and based on the current program outcomes and need, Urban Community Alliance is asking



Formerly NHFA/VETTS

for an increase of \$100,000 to support fatherhood and family supportive services statewide.

2. **Juvenile Review Board:** In 2018 Juvenile Review Boards (JRB) across the state were put in jeopardy when the General Assembly moved juvenile justice functions from the Department of Children and Families to the Judicial branch but didn't move the funding for juvenile review boards along with it and New Haven's JRB, one of the state's largest programs, was significantly impacted by this change. Late in 2018, the funding was restored and returned back to Department of children and Families oversight and on behalf of the 159 unduplicated youth who New Haven's JRB diverted from the criminal justice system and provided alternatives to suspension/expulsion and supported in reconnecting to school that improved attendance and graduation outcomes, we say Thank You For Your Support. Urban Community Alliance, JRB is committed to impacting racial inequities in education and the criminal justice systems for juveniles in New Haven and Hamden by serving African American and Latin students in schools in New Haven. One of our goals has been to reduce the school to prison pipeline for African American and Latin youth. JRB is one of the alternatives used to support this goal. Since urban juvenile review boards have been in place, first-time offenders referred to the court have fallen 46 percent in New Haven. An opportunity to interrupt that pipeline into the criminal justice system for our kids. Moreover, the majority of children diverted from court in these cities have been children of color. Children in our urban communities get arrested for what children in other communities get taken home to the parents for. Urban Community Alliance requests that Juvenile Review Boards continue to be supported at the current rate and that an increase in funding should be considered based on the restorative justice framework's impact on improving truancy and in school negative behavior that keep more students in school. We recommend and urge you to increase the CSSD budget for JRB to \$50,000 to support our services in rewriting youths mistakes and turning them into success.
3. **Intensive Family Preservation and Reunification:** Served 32 families in 2019, approximately a total of 50 people. The youth are the main beneficiary of this program, and the goal is that once we close the case, the family and DCF will work with our recommendation for the parents and children to continue to engage in therapy, have good attendance at school, keep sobriety, etc. The families referred are DCF involved and potential risk factors related to parenting, substance abuse, or physical discipline. Addressing these issues and improving parenting behavior and skills take time to overcome and modify so the families and children present healthier. This intervention presents challenges and requires a continuum of care. Some families take longer for change to happen and aren't as ready to change. Others make enough change before we



Formerly NHFA/VETTS

close and discharge and empowered to sustain a productive and healthy quality of life. DCF's "Connecticut's Family's First" proposal and community involvement in the process is a step in the right direction and cost-effective for supporting families and keeping children and youth in the community. We recommend and urge you to increase the DCF Family First Initiative to \$50,000 to support more families through community involvement.

- 4. Veterans Empowering Youth Through Support (VETTS):** VETTS mission is to establish restorative justice through effective mentoring programs that support youth and their emerging racial identities with the tools and confidence to make better life decisions, which will result in developing productive citizens who will make meaningful contributions that allow urban communities to thrive. Since the program's inception, VETTS has served approximately 500 youth in Connecticut. Reduce juvenile crime and recidivism. Improve school attitude (attendance, performance, post-secondary aspirations). Improve career attitude (interest, motivation for job-acquisition). Reduce health-related concerns (substance abuse, psychological stress, physical health). Increase engagement in pro-social recreational activities. Improve life and social skills (budgeting, managing conflict, reduce family discord).

More than 500 youths between the ages of 12-21 in the New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport areas have been served since the inception of the Vetts Mentoring program. The Vetts received a minimal increase in the funding year 2019-20 that supported a slight increase in the number served and matched in intensive mentoring relationships with a Vet mentor. Our integrated approach to supporting the development of youth exposed to urban trauma has proven to be successful. Examples of program impact on the community include a reduction in the recidivism rate (has remained a low 10% compared to the national average of 55%). Improved school attitude, improved future orientation, career, attitude, reduce health-related concerns, increase in pro-social recreational activities such as sports and exercise. Urban Community Alliance is currently seeking to expand this program and serve more juveniles statewide. Based on State budget cuts and the city of New Haven's inability to secure youth development funds, plus their budget crisis, all mentoring programs were terminated. This left the most vulnerable youth without many support services. As a result, violence has increased in the city after having reached an all-time low in past years. We recommend and urge you to increase the CSSD mentoring support to \$300,000 to be used for prevention and intensive Vets mentoring support.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the Urban Community Alliance supportive case management and mentoring support to the 930



Formerly NHFA/VETTS

children, youth, fathers and families served through the support and advocacy provided by the Appropriations Committee's recommendations and insight.