



Testimony for Appropriations Committee

Health Subcommittee

**Public Hearing re: HB 5005, AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2021**

Susan Sarmiento

The Governor's Partnership to Protect Connecticut's Workforce

DBA The Governor's Prevention Partnership

February 21, 2020

Good evening distinguished committee members.

My name is Susan Sarmiento and I am a parent of two children. I live in Hartford as a proud neighbor from Behind the Rocks, Minnie Gonzales's district. I am here today in support of HB#5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021 which supports The Governor's Prevention Partnership through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Today I come to you representing the many parents and families that struggle everyday with the results of drug and alcohol abuse in our city and to testify on the impact that The Partnership's program, Por Los Niños, has had on me and other families. As a community, we must face the ugly reality of seeing victims of overdosing on the streets or being mindful that our children don't step on a needle or get too close to people smoking marijuana on the playground.

Every day I take my 6-year-old to the bus and often see people buying drugs on the corner of Park street. Before becoming involved with The Partnership, I was so desensitized to these activities that I simply told my children "keep Walking, walk fast".



My understanding of drugs in my community would change forever after spring of 2018 when I participated in my first workshop on drug prevention and substance abuse hosted by the Program Por Los Niños from the Governor's Prevention Partnership. For the first time someone was opening the conversation and making a culturally competent attempt to educate our families about the opioid epidemic, giving us tips on how to start the conversations with our children and what to do if drugs are offered at school. These workshops helped me build the skills necessary to have an informed conversation with my six-year-old about healthy choices, positive friendships, and the difference between help and harm. They also helped me understand my role as a parent in safe storage and disposal of medication in my home.

Over time, I continued to participate in drug prevention trainings and then I started volunteering to help other parents learn about prevention. I now work full time at The Partnership as a program coordinator for parent and mentor engagement. Through managing Por Los Ninos, I am reaching my community and helping to guide and empower them through necessary conversations on youth prevention. The Latino community has unique cultural barriers surrounding issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, and programs like these are necessary to breaking down those barriers and facilitating growth. As program coordinator, I have expanded our scope by training parents to host their own community cafes like the ones I attended when I first became familiar with the partnership. So far, four have been led by parents in their apartment buildings, schools, and family centers. Our parent leaders and volunteers stress the importance of creating safe space for their children to share and maintaining open,

