

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee**

**Public Hearing re: H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING
THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE
THIRTIETH, 2023**

**Roland Harmon
The Governor's Prevention Partnership
March 2, 2021**

Senators Osten, Abrams, Somers, and Representatives Walker, Dillon, and Kennedy, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Roland Harmon, and I am humbly submitting testimony as the Co-President of The Governor's Prevention Partnership. I am a father, grandfather, son, person of faith, and student.

I am here today to ask for your support to keep the state's prevention infrastructure intact so that our young people can grow and thrive in supportive families and communities.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership has empowered families and communities for over 31 years in in collaboration with public and private partners to reduce the risk of substance abuse, bullying, and violence among Connecticut youth. Our seasoned team of prevention professionals works with parents, schools, and organizations to provide effective prevention and intervention strategies to help young people stay safe, drug-free, and thrive in their communities and personal lives.

In the midst of this dreadful pandemic that has impacted the lives of so many in our state, we have pivoted during the time of our new normal through virtual connections

and opportunities to broaden our reach as a convener, an innovator, and change agent, a funder, a thought leader, and an advocate. We are taking initial steps to ensure that our services infuse culturally responsive activities and best practices in both prevention and youth mentoring strategies. Our board, team and key stakeholders have made the commitment to ensure our services are, relevant, inclusive, and meet young people and families where they in this day and age.

Since we were here last year, we have leveraged the dollars that we have received through the state's investment to secure an additional \$800,000 in grants to better support Connecticut youth.

These grants focus on few key areas:

- **Mentoring Services for LGBTQ youth:** This initiative funded by Pitney Bowes has enabled the development of an LGBTQ Mentoring Advisory Committee that working towards developing tools and resources for local mentoring programs to effectively support this youth population. Efforts are providing training for mentors, the recruitment of mentors with lived experience and creation of inclusive and welcoming communities where young people can thrive and have voice.
- **Reduce youth substance misuse:** Por Los Ninos' has expanded to serve communities in Hartford and Waterbury in reducing substance misuse among Latino youth in fourth through twelfth grades. As all hands are on deck across our state to address the opioid and heroin epidemic, The Partnership continues to provide tools and resources to create culturally responsive public awareness campaigns with local community-based organizations and is

strengthening the work of parent leaders to support parents in accessing service to prevent substance misuse.

- **Expansion of virtual youth mentoring and rapid response conversations:** At the start of the pandemic, we knew immediately we needed to ensure that youth in mentoring relationships stayed connected to their mentor. With support from Webster Bank and Cigna, First Niagara Foundation, and Eversource we facilitated a series of virtual mentoring trainings for local programs to shift their connections with mentees, mental health and wellness training opportunities for mentors in supporting youth throughout this pandemic, and rapid response conversations providing tips and tools for mentors to have guided conversations with their mentees in light of social events, exposure to trauma and dealing with anxiety to stay connected and engaged.

As you consider the many programs and investments the State makes, please consider this: **an investment in prevention makes the biggest impact at the lowest cost.**

These are difficult times, and we recognize that during these times your work is just as difficult if not more than it has ever been. Balancing the needs of our state during these extraordinary times is not easy. Let us remember though, that every dollar invested in prevention programs has the potential to save up to \$18 in costs related to substance use disorders. For the cost of one hospitalization and one year of treatment, The Partnership, and other prevention-focused organizations, can positively impact the lives of many young people across our state.

I urge you to support The Partnership and other youth prevention initiatives at the maximum funding possible.

Thank you,

Roland Harmon

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