

**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  
Jasmine Prezzie, MSW  
Human Services Council Norwalk, CT 06851  
March 2, 2021**

Good Morning Distinguished Members of the Committee:

It is a pleasure to come before you all. My name is Jasmine Prezzie. I am a Norwalk resident, a graduate of the Norwalk Public Schools, and a former mentee in the Norwalk Mentor Program. In September 2020, I became the Director of the Norwalk Mentor Program. The program I was a participant in for over ten years. The Norwalk Mentor Program is the first school-based mentoring program in the country. For the past 35 years, we have been matching students with adult volunteer mentors. Mentors meet with students once a week for one hour, and that single hour changes both the lives of mentors and mentees. We partner with the Norwalk Public Schools to match mentors with chronically absent students. 94% of our mentees feel more optimistic about their future, 99% of our mentees' parents say their child seems happier, 94% of our mentees try harder in school, and 93% of our mentees make better decisions.

Due to COVID 19, we transitioned our program from on-site to virtual. We currently have 310 mentors and mentees meeting almost every week. We are recruiting mentors monthly. Just this year alone, we have already recruited close to 40 mentors. It was essential for us to address the needs of our students and community. We

know that our youth became isolated with led to depression and emotional dysregulation. Our young people needed mentoring more than ever. We provided them with a stable, caring, supportive adult to have fun with on zoom while being home.

I am an example of what a mentored youth can do for our community if invested in properly. While I was in school, I had a mentor from first grade to high school! I still have a great relationship with my mentor to this day. I remember all the lessons and life skills my mentor instilled in me and how special I felt when my mentor continued to show up for me through every transition of my life: elementary school, middle school, high school, and now a three-time college graduate working in the social service field.

One of our 6th-grade mentees expressed, "my mentor makes me feel like I can make it." The Norwalk Mentor Program truly makes a difference in Norwalk's youth, and I believe that other programs should replicate our mentoring model throughout the state. I encourage you to maximize funding for mentoring programs like the Governor's Prevention Partnership and the Norwalk Mentor Program because we are doing the work and genuinely planting prosperous seeds in the lives of young people that will grow up to reach their fullest potential and become our next community leaders.