

**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**

Menen Walker

On Behalf of The Governor's Prevention Partnership

March 2, 2021

My name is Menen Walker, my pronouns are she/her, and I am an eighteen-year-old freshman at Capital Community College in Hartford. I am here to support The Governor's Prevention Partnership and other prevention organizations on the front lines supporting young people through this pandemic. I am a proud advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, a member of The Partnership's Youth Advisory Board, and a youth peer advocate for the Windsor Locks Wellness Coalition, where I have been a member since my sophomore year of high school.

Our coalition focuses on spreading awareness about the dangers of substance abuse and underage drinking to our classmates. We follow a peer-to-peer prevention model, which means we focus on making connections with other young people by having open and honest conversations that can be difficult to have with adults. The Partnership's Youth Advisory Board empowers youth to be advocates for ourselves and our peers by helping us build skills and knowledge while connecting us with our peers from around the state.

Over the summer, they hosted a panel called “Celebrating us: Voices of LGBTQ+ Youth.” I, alongside three other peer advocates and Rep. Jeff Currey, discussed the importance of centering youth voices on LGBTQ+ issues and how adults who want to be good allies must listen, learn, and act on the concerns of LGBTQ+ youth. The Partnership created a safe, judgment-free environment for us to talk about our needs and lived experience. We also talked about the value of inclusive mentoring opportunities and new initiatives at The Partnership to support inclusive mentoring around the state.

Like thousands of young people across Connecticut, isolation has been one of the hardest things for me to cope with during the pandemic. This panel meant a lot to me and other peer advocates who thrive on community because it reminded me that we are not alone and that our work must continue in this new and changing world. That is why I am here today advocating for as much money as possible for prevention during these uncertain times. The Governor’s Prevention Partnership provides essential resources to developing leaders throughout the state. They understand that connection is what keeps prevention and hope for a better future alive. I hope you will reinvest in my peers and me by supporting The Partnership and this life-changing work. Thank you for your time.