

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Health and Hospitals
On the DMHAS Budget
H.B. 6365, the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget**

**By Jaimie DeSisto, Program Coordinator, for the Champions
Mentoring Program/Family ReEntry
The Governor's Partnership to Protect Connecticut's Workforce
DBA The Governor's Prevention Partnership
February 20, 2009**

Good afternoon/evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Harris, Representative Ryan and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jaimie DeSisto, Program Coordinator of the Champions Mentoring Program.

I'm here today to ask for your continued support for prevention programs so that our young people can grow and thrive in nurturing families and communities and one day take their place in Connecticut's workforce.

The Champions program is dedicated to the cause because we have experienced first hand how prevention programs can impact life choices. The Champions Mentoring Program is a nationally recognized mentoring program serving children aged 6 to 15 who have one or both parents in prison and reside in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The program was initiated in 2003 and partially funded through September 30, 2006 by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau. The program was a collaborative effort between Family ReEntry and The Governor's Prevention Partnership, and its division: Connecticut Mentoring Partnership. Again, in 2007 Champions Mentoring received continued funding through the US Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau. Although The Governors Prevention Partnership is not formally on our 2007 grant; they continue to be a vocal and strong supporter of Champions.

Many mentoring programs across the state have witnessed a drop in the number of potential volunteers. During these scary and turbulent economic times volunteers find themselves looking to pick up more work hours or overtime, time that would be used for volunteering. This is/was the case with Champions. Champions had found itself at a plateau of potential mentors. One of our challenges was reaching out to those people who had the time to donate and the willingness to get involved and become a mentor. The Governors Prevention Partnership is the organization in the State of CT to be on the cutting edge of providing information to it's constituents on everything from mentoring to helping keep children away from drugs and alcohol. Within the last year Champions has taken full advantage of attending all workshops provided by the Governors Prevention Partnership, in attempt to attract and retain mentors. These workshops, conferences and round table discussions are not only helpful for each program; it helps build camaraderie for all the mentoring programs across the state. Not only do they provide information, tips and tactics that programs might not have already thought of, but working with GPP gives the programs a sense of security.

In August, Champions held its first Open House/Information Session. This gave the staff an opportunity to meet with individuals who were interested in learning more about our program in a relaxed and open environment. We had the pleasure of having a GPP staff person attend the Open House and share with everyone the programs and ideas they were working on to better support programs around the state. After collecting some more materials and information on what GPP is doing for all of it programs, we present this information to our potential volunteers. Since the 1st Open House where a GPP staff member came we have had an influx of new mentors last quarter we gained five new mentors.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership saves Connecticut money. We know that nearly \$10 is returned for every dollar invested in prevention. The Partnership provides the expertise to help prevention programs grow and enlist businesses to invest in prevention.

In the days ahead, please continue to support their tireless commitment, work, and energy as they tackle the serious issues affecting our children and their futures, from underage drinking and drug abuse to violence prevention and bullying to mastering the skills and schooling needed to succeed. We need The Governor's Prevention Partnership to protect our future workforce.

Thank you.