



Catholic Charities

Archdiocese of Hartford

To: Senator Tony Harp, Representative Geragosian, members of the Appropriations Committee
From: Tiffany Murasso, Catholic Charities, Centro San Jose Youth Program
Re: Neighborhood Youth Centers line item in OPM budget **Date:** 3/11/10

Centro San Jose, a program of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Hartford, and a Neighborhood Youth Center funded through OPM, is the only provider of afterschool/youth programming in Fair Haven that is offered at no cost to youth and their families. Since CSJ does not charge a fee to youth/families to participate in programming, it serves exclusively economically disadvantaged youth. The OPM Neighborhood Youth Center has enabled CSJ to leverage other funding in the community in order to run a successful, full time program for Youth. Without a Neighborhood Youth Center grant, CSJ would be forced to eliminate its entire Youth program, severely and dramatically reducing the availability of services in a neighborhood experience persistent, intergenerational poverty. **Without this program the 140 youth we serve annually would not be able to attend youth programming due to the financial constraints of their families, and would be at increased risk to engage in activities that negatively impede their development and harm their community.**

CSJ is unique in Fair Haven because it exclusively targets youth between the ages of 12 and 18, offering programming appropriate to their age, maturation level, gender, and culture. According to research cited by the State of CT. Department of Education, high school and middle school aged youth need afterschool programming just as much, if not more than students in the elementary grades. CSJ serves some of the state's neediest youth. Not only do all youth come from economically disadvantaged households, many of the youth served by CSJ have behavioral/emotional issues and are involved in the child welfare system.

Neighborhood Youth Center programming has a significant impact on the entire traditionally underserved Fair Haven community. Fair Haven has a significant youth population. Of its 13,753 reported residents 34.4% are 18 years old or younger (4,731). (Data Haven) CSJ has been proudly serving this community for more than 50 years and is viewed as a valuable resource by parents with young children and youth including families involved in the immigration system, and families who do not speak English or speak English as a Second Language.

In a December 6, 2009 presentation about crime in the city New Haven Police Chief James Lewis noted the need for youth programs in the city. He stated that one of the two major challenges to keeping crime down is addressing the needs of "lost" youth. **Data from the NH Independent Crime Log reveals the afterschool period of the day has the highest number of incident reports in Fair Haven, further emphasizing the need for community-based youth programs which use evidence-based approaches to achieve the goal of preventing violence and illegal drug use.** Data from the month of Oct. 2009 revealed within ¼ mile area surrounding the center of Fair Haven there were 343 incidents reported in this area alone, including breach of peace, attempted suicide, criminal trespass, drug overdose, theft, and assault with a dangerous weapon.

Past program participants come back as adults and credit many of their successes to CSJ. Teachers and other community members report that the youth who participate in our programs stop being followers and become youth leaders. The youth who come to CSJ report more positive experiences in school. Youth also experience significant long term improvements in key areas such as communication, leadership, personal life, and problem solving skills.

We respectfully request that the above information is considered during this budget process. Thank you for your time and consideration for this very serious matter. Thank you.