

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Health and Hospitals
On the DMHAS Budget and the
Governor's Proposed FY 15 Budget Adjustments**

**By Jill Spinetti, President and CEO
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Good Afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon, Senator Kelly, Representative Betts and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Health and Hospitals. My name is Jill Spinetti, and I am the president of The Governor's Prevention Partnership. We are a nonprofit organization recognizing our 25th anniversary this year. We build strong partnerships between government and corporations, schools, law enforcement and community groups and provide resources and services so that young people in our state grow up free from substance abuse, underage drinking, violence and bullying.

I'm here today to ask for your support for a proven prevention strategy that has a strong foothold in our state—youth mentoring. Sixteen years ago we launched the Connecticut Mentoring Partnership to grow and expand quality-based mentoring throughout the state. At present, there are 190 mentoring programs in Connecticut serving 23,000 young people. There are 70 schools systems involved in mentoring along with over 100 community based programs, with strong hubs in our urban centers. Hartford has 25 mentoring programs; Bridgeport 18, and New Haven 11. While those numbers are impressive, we cite a critical and growing need to provide mentors to those young people who need them most. We are finding that as kids today face ever-increasing challenges to succeed and parents and caregivers are saddled with making ends meet, the need for mentors keeps growing, and estimate that at least an additional 180,000 young people could benefit from mentoring.

Just one month ago, a case was brought to my attention where a troubled young teen in our state was reported missing by her parents; once found, the only person she wanted to talk to was her mentor. We think that speaks volumes for the power of the relationships that are formed.

Mentoring continues to evolve because we have a research agenda at the National level that guides practice. To be effective and get measureable outcomes, mentoring programs must follow a set of best practice standards that ensure that a young person will have a positive effect from the mentoring relationship.

While most mentoring programs understand and want to adhere to these standards, unfortunately, many of them have unmet needs due to staffing and budget limitations. So, often they are not able to conduct effective recruitment campaigns, training and sometimes even mentor screening.

Today, I am asking you to support the creation of the Connecticut Mentoring Fund, based on a highly successful model being used in our neighboring state of Massachusetts. The Connecticut Mentoring Fund would be a public-private initiative with an initial \$400,000 investment from the State, and distribution would be divided over the period of the biennium budget and administered through The Governor's Prevention Partnership.

The selected programs would be chosen through a competitive RFP process and would be based on their commitment to continuous quality improvement, ability to sustain growth, and strong program goals and objectives; those chosen would be tracked to ensure dollars were well-spent both financially and programmatically. The state investment would then leverage additional private contributions; we already have a private commitment of \$25,000 to start the fund, and through our strong corporate partnerships, I am certain that we would be able to raise additional revenue for this fund from the private sector.

In fact, several business leaders have told me they would rather contribute to a fund that is overseen and distributed to mentoring programs based on quality standards, rather than blindly provide funding directly to individual programs, uncertain of that program's ability to produce expected and necessary outcomes.

To end, I would like to highlight that the value of mentoring is being recognized as a powerful prevention and intervention strategy and is now being used in our state to serve young people in the juvenile justice system and DCF; children who have experienced multiple traumas and are in difficult circumstances can benefit from a mentor who is trained specifically to advocate on their behalf.

Our research shows that children with mentors have a better shot at life, higher aspirations, better connections with their family and at school, and are more likely to go to school and care about their grades, all helping them to eventually find a place in our future workforce.

Your modest investment in the Connecticut Mentoring Fund will help me to leverage additional dollars that will be put right to use by the programs that need the resources most. Please, consider this request to invest in the future of our young people by funding a proven, effective prevention strategy that will help to get thousands more young people on track.

Thank you.