

Testimony on STRIVE

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Good evening, my name is Scott Wilderman and I am the CEO of Career Resources, Inc., the organization that operates the STRIVE programs in CT in Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport. I am here tonight in front of this committee to ask you to please reconsider eliminating the STRIVE Program from the budget. If this program is terminated, the \$270,000 saved by the state is but a fraction of the projected two billion dollar deficit and really has a negligible impact on the overall state budget. It does however have an impact on the hundreds of low income and disenfranchised individuals that graduate from this program annually and become taxpaying citizens thus reducing the state's liability. Many of these graduates were part of federal and state entitlement programs, but since being employed full time they have reduced or eliminated their utilization of public benefits.

Over the past 6 years, the State of Connecticut invested roughly \$1.5 million into STRIVE. For this investment, 450 graduates were placed into employment. The combined annualized employment income for these graduates was \$7.7 million. This translates into \$1.1 million in taxes paid annually, or nearly a 400% return on investment for the State. Considering that of the 450 graduates placed into employment, 66% were former offenders, 41% were single parents, 80% were receiving some form of public assistance while 20% did not have a H.S. diploma, the outcomes here are quite remarkable. As these stats indicate, nearly half of our population are former offenders and this project aligns with Governor's Second Chance Society Initiative. In fact, STRIVE was the Second Chance Society before there was ever a Second Chance Society. More importantly, the current legislation is focusing mostly on those

that are coming out of incarceration, but in our communities we have thousands of former offenders that have been released and still struggling to survive. A lot of them end up at STRIVE. While the \$270K was not a lot of money, it did provide the foundational support for STRIVE. As a result of these funds, we were able to leverage these funds and win a Federal SAMSHA grant in New Haven that serves former offenders with mental health and addiction issues. This Federal grant is now in jeopardy of being lost because of the elimination of these STRIVE funds.

You may ask why is this program so successful . . .What makes this program different is that STRIVE (Support and Training Result In Valuable Employees) is not a traditional occupational skills training or academic enrichment classroom program. It is an in-your-face, attitudinal adjustment, experiential learning program that confronts and addresses individual behaviors that prohibit workplace success. STRIVE recognizes that many people have never gained the foundational “soft skills” to succeed. Their inability to work cooperatively, handle criticism, or successfully navigate the myriad of spoken and unspoken expectations in any workplace have often meant people lose job after job without understanding why -- or how -- to change.

STRIVE delivers a personalized and practical introduction to the world of work itself. You will most likely hear, if you have not already heard from some of our graduates tonight, of the impact that this program has had on their personal and professional lives.

Finally, I want the appropriations committee to understand that as a non-profit community we have done everything possible to reduce the cost of this program without sacrificing the quality and the integrity of the STRIVE model. In an effort to hold down both program and administrative costs the STRIVE Connecticut program merged all under one non-

profit, Career Resources. The bottom line is that is that STRIVE model serves any Connecticut resident who chooses to participate, regardless of skill level, incarceration history or financial means. STRIVE shows outstanding results compared to other employment and training programs, while operating at a fraction of the cost. I am therefore asking that you please consider supporting this critical program – A program that actually pays for itself.