



Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee on February 27, 2015

HB 6824: An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017

Submitted by Jose Lugo Graduate of Fatherhood Program, Community Renewal Team

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jose Lugo and I am here to urge you to save the funding known as H.S.I., or the Human Services Infrastructure. With that money, the Community Renewal Team and the other Community Action Agencies can help a lot of people who don't have anywhere else to turn. Tonight I want to tell you about a Fatherhood program that helps guys like me when we get out of prison. The salary for the program coordinator is covered by the H.S.I. funds.

I'm a really involved dad. Really proud. I never miss my son's high school football games, and now we're visiting colleges that want to recruit him.

But I lost five years of my kids' lives while I was serving a federal sentence for drug sales. My wife was great – she brought the kids down to Virginia every two to three months for family visits at the prison. But in 2013 when I got out, the little one barely knew me. The two older ones, they couldn't trust that I'd be there for them. More than a year after my release, my daughter still wanted a daily "check in" call whenever I was out of town.

So where does CRT come in? When I first got out of prison I was sent to a halfway house in Hartford, and assigned to CRT for drug treatment and recovery counseling. At that point, I had been sober at least five years, and I admit – I didn't see why I needed to be there. I was programmed out.

More than that – I already had a job down in Milford selling cars for Bob's Chevrolet. Every day I took a train down to New Haven, my wife picked me up and drove me to the job. End of the day, we reverse that. Where do I find time to go to CRT for these groups?

But sometimes God puts you where you need to be. At the same CRT building, I heard about a Fatherhood group that could help guys readjust to life at home. So I started going every week. I got close with Dennis Tomczak, who runs the CRT Fatherhood Initiative.

He talked about how hard it is for kids to be separated from their dads, and then how hard it was to get used to being back together. Doesn't matter why they were separated, they feel the loss. I heard about how you have to ease back into the picture, understand who made the rules while you were away. I had to work for their respect.



For some guys that doesn't sit well. They walk back in, they want to put their foot down and say 'I'm the boss.' That doesn't work, right?

We talked about disciplining kids, and how they might question us. Some kids might say, 'What right do you have to make the rules? You broke the rules, you got in trouble, you were arrested.'

When they act out like that, Dennis would tell us we needed to see it from the kids' point of view. They're showing us they love us and need us. But also that they were hurt when we left them.

But it wasn't all about raising children. We also talked about our core values, communicating with our partners, and how a lot of us need to control things. I've never really sat down and talked about any of that. I think it was new to all of us.

The staff at CRT, they know all the research behind a program like this. How getting a group of guys to look at themselves differently can make a difference. How it's important to make positive connections with your children and your community when you get out of prison.

For me, finding Dennis and the others at CRT was one of those positive connections. I graduated from the group last year, and I still keep in touch. I let them know how I'm doing, how my family is doing. They mean a lot to me.

That's why I drove here straight here from my job. I wanted to be here to support the Fatherhood program, to tell you that this program should not be on the chopping block. It helps a lot of guys like me, but more important – it helps our kids. It has this big effect on the next generation.

I've got a great relationship with my kids today. I'm really proud of them. But I think about being my son's age, and already being out on the streets. I was in trouble from the age of 17, and I'm determined that's not happening again, not for my sons or my daughter.

Thank you for offering me this chance to speak.

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