

Dear Co- Chairs Senator Beth Bye, Representative Ezequiel Santiago and Conservation and Development Subcommittee Members:

This written testimony is in regard to the elimination of \$270,000 for the STRIVE program from the Governor's proposed Budget under the Department of Labor Budget.

I am a graduate of the STRIVE program offered at the New Haven site. In November 2013 I was a dislocated worker receiving unemployment benefits for the first time in my life. I accessed every job readiness program available to me including CT works. I was at my wits end until I stumbled upon STRIVE. No other agency or organization for work readiness, job placement or resume building can compare to the experience I had at STRIVE. I learned what it would take to leave my "cants" at the door. I was grieving the loss of my husband, a job and other family members. I did not want to lose my home as well. Building my self- confidence and self- esteem with the help of the staff and the members of my class was work. STRIVE made me work. There is no other experience that compares. It teaches me to reach deep inside myself both intellectually and emotionally. The skills it provides are more than about a job. They are life skills that make me a better employee. Thinking about how to sell myself, my appearance, handshake and smile have helped me in the interview process and in sustaining employment.

Soon after my graduation I was offered a job at STRIVE. I remain employed and have the opportunity to work with participants everyday imparting the fundamental principles of the program. I share my experience with them. I am able to administrate and work to keep funders and partners as collaborators as we strengthen what we can offer our communities. I am very proud to be able to pay it forward.

Humility is an important part of what STRIVE teaches. No matter what economic, social ethnic or racial background, having been incarcerated, having a criminal background, educated beyond a high school diploma or just trying to obtain a basic education does not separate those wanting to change their lives. The one thing we all have in common is that we are un or under employed. We want to be able to support ourselves, raise our families and pay taxes. We cannot get a job if we do not feel we are good enough. STRIVE makes sure that we feel better about ourselves and what we have had to deal with in our lives, good or bad.

You may be wondering why \$270,000 is such a large amount to STRIVE and such a small or insignificant amount in relation to the overall budget. I did not have to pay for the hours I spent at STRIVE. With no job I could not have afforded the \$3500 it cost to put me through the three week workshop. That was over a year ago, costs escalate and the funding remains stagnant. With this biennial budget cut of the \$270,000 what are we to tell our participants? "Seating is limited, the duration of classes is shorter, we cannot extend to you unlimited services You may be unemployed longer, have to consider bankruptcy, share housing or become homeless, and become delinquent in your State taxes." For every State dollar we spend on labor we get back at least triple fold.

STRIVE is amazing. I welcome any and every one of you to come to our classes and observe/participate in our graduations, speak to our participants, offer to do their mock interviews. You will be amazed and cast your vote to reinstate the \$270,000 STRIVE needs to stay alive.

Respectfully submitted by,

Ann Tramontana-Veno