



Testimony regarding S.B. 1135: An Act Establishing a Sustainable Path for Maintaining the Budget Reserve Fund and Reducing the Effect of Revenue Volatility on the State Budget

Presented Before the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

Submitted By Solar Youth, Inc.

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Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We speak today on behalf of Solar Youth, Inc.

S.B. 1135 seeks to reduce the effect of revenue volatility on our state's budget. We testify in favor of this effort, as well as in favor of higher revenue in the upcoming fiscal year to avoid harmful cuts to crucial public services.

Solar Youth empowers youth from New Haven's neighborhoods with the highest rates of poverty **to achieve lifelong success**. We do this through programs that support children ages 4 through graduation of high school that are embedded in the neighborhoods. In our programs, youth explore their environment, develop youth-led community service action projects, learn skills of compassionate communication and mindfulness, and build leadership skills eventually becoming the teachers and mentors to younger children. Please see our Newsletter for details.

Support from the State of Connecticut has helped us provide opportunities and supports to over 2000 children since 2000. Each year we reach over 450 youth. Solar Youth is just one example of how \$600 million of cuts in the Governor's budget can cause an enormous ripple effect of cost, not only to the lives of our children and their families, but to our state in the long-term impact of not investing in the positive development of youth in our cities. There would also be a cost to the 11 full time employees of Solar Youth and our ability to create over 60 internships to at-risk teens.

The funding we receive through grants from the State Department of Education, Office of Policy and Management and through a Violence Prevention grant to the City of New Haven totals \$150,000 – a small portion of the \$600 million cuts – is absolutely critical to the continuation of the supports we provide to some of our state's most vulnerable youth.

In order to avoid the harmful effect of these cuts, we ask the committee to raise revenue. We support the revenue ideas of groups like Connecticut Voices for Children, including a more progressive income tax, the elimination of certain tax breaks, and raising the cigarette tax, among others.

Thank you for your time.

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Karoz Toney, age 16. Years in Solar Youth: 2

My name is Karoz Toney I'm a student at New Haven Academy and Gateway. Solar Youth is a getaway for me. It keeps me occupied when I'm not in school. It gives me an opportunity to spend time with young kids and to teach them about the environment, teamwork, and themselves. When I was younger I didn't grow up in a neighborhood with Solar Youth around. There was mostly violence and gang related activity. But once I moved to Westville Manor where Solar Youth is stationed, it gave me a new light and experience.

I can't imagine life without Solar Youth. There wouldn't be an escape from the violence in the community and chaos from their family. If Solar Youth wasn't in numerous communities, kids that go to the programs wouldn't have anything to do or occupy their minds. And we all know what happens when kids are really bored - they look for trouble. And trouble can lead kids down the wrong path and in the world we are trying to put kids on the helpful path not the harmful path. Some of my friends don't have a place to escape to like I do. Their escape was the streets, which can lead to bad decisions that can lead to bad consequences due to irresponsible actions. **And lately Connecticut has been trying to decrease the violence, so what's a better way to do that in a small step is to keep Solar Youth going, so young children won't be consumed by the streets.** So please with every piece of affection that you guys have, please let Solar Youth continue at what they are best at and that's winning kids' hearts.

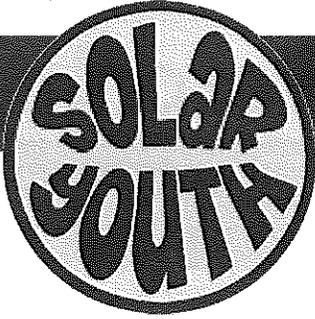
Corey Bethea, age 16. Years in Solar Youth: 6

Hello, my name is Corey Bethea. I am 16 years old, and attend high school at Eli Whitney in Hamden. When I was in middle school I first connected with Solar Youth - a program that empowers youth in New Haven to achieve a lifelong success by supporting their connection to the environment, their communities and each other. Each season we work with youth to identify problems in our community. Then we try to solve that problem with a C-SAP (Community Service Action Project). Some were cleaning our neighborhoods and some were raising money for different causes. Through Solar Youth, I learned to care for my environment by being aware of the things I do, like littering. Solar Youth also works on building connections with others. With that skill I made a lot of friends. We also work on mindfulness, which means "paying attention on purpose." We do this because we want to be mindful to each other at all times. **Mindfulness made me be aware of other people's feelings and made me calmer and less stressed.**

I worked with Solar Youth when I was in 7th grade as a Leader in Training. Today I work as an intern with Citycology - a program for kids age 4 to 8. It's really fun teaching young kids the things I learned, and showing them that they can make a difference in the world. Solar Youth made me a better person by helping me with my grades, helping me step up and become a leader, and make a positive difference in the lives of New Haven kids. Without Solar Youth I wouldn't be here right now. I would never have gotten this lifelong success. Please continue to support Solar Youth so we can make a difference in the kids' lives in New Haven. Just like they did for me.

FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Testimony to CT State Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

April 23, 2015

Please support continued funding for Solar Youth!

Solar Youth's mission is to **empower young people** to **achieve lifelong success** through connection to the environment, their communities and each other.

In order to have transformational impact on the lives of the youth we serve – those living in the New Haven neighborhoods with the highest rates of poverty, crime and health disparities – Solar Youth has created a menu of programs called the **Cycle of Stewardship** that allow youth to progressively build on experiences over time, gaining **critical personal and social competencies** and **professional skills** and **servicing as stewards to their communities and environment**.

SOLAR YOUTH PROGRAMS...

- Target youth with the fewest supports and resources to succeed
- Are offered year-round for youth from ages 4 to 18+
- Nurture personal and social competencies
- Provide rigorous professional training for teenagers
- Create the next generation of community and environmental stewards
- Give youth a boost in science class
- Are youth-driven
- **Are cost effective:** Solar Youth serves 450+ youth annually, all on an annual budget of \$700,000. In the coming year, with support from the State of Connecticut, Solar Youth expects to serve close to 600 youth as we expand programs to support 100% high school graduation and career/college planning.

Solar Youth saves Connecticut money:

- According to the recent report, "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth," each youth who is neither in school nor employed "imposes – on average and compared to other youth – **an immediate taxpayer burden of \$13,900 per year and an immediate social burden of \$37,450 per year** (2011 dollars). When these "opportunity youth" reach 25, "he or she will subsequently impose a **future lifetime taxpayer burden of \$170,740 and a social burden of \$529,030.**"
- According to the Connecticut After School Network, "**every dollar invested in after school programs will save taxpayers approximately \$3, not including the savings from reduced crime**" and "**\$1.7 to \$2.3 million is saved by putting one high-risk youth on the right path.**"

Quick Fact for SY

Youth Reached/year:
>450

Teenagers hired/year:
>50

Yearly Budget: \$700,000

Major Program Elements:

Youth-led
Community Service
Action Projects

Exploration
of the urban and
natural environment

Training in
Nonviolent
Communication

Skills in
Mindfulness, conflict
resolution, & stress-
reduction

Employability skills for
teens as educators and
community
problem-solvers

Please continue to support the most vulnerable youth in our state as well as funding for Solar Youth's after-school programming via the State Department of Education!

Solar Youth's Cycle of Stewardship

PROGRAMS: A young person's journey can start as early as age 4 and continue into adulthood. In the final phase, youth are seasoned leaders, serving as educators for younger children. The circle below shows the Cycle's menu of programs.

PRESENCE: solar Youth nurtures young people through a consistent presence in their communities and lives. We build safe, consistent, loving relationships with youth throughout their childhood and adolescence.

PARTNERS: Youth have needs beyond our expertise. Through partnerships, Solar Youth provides supports and opportunities that go beyond what we alone can offer. As a result, the system of support is more efficient and effective.

Youth Start Here

Rakema
Years in Solar Youth: 6



89%
of families indicate that Solar Youth helps youth become better friends

"I learned to be a nice girl and not to fight with other people when they do bad stuff."

Royshon
Years in Solar Youth: 7



91%
of Interns indicate that Solar Youth helped them develop a more positive sense of self

"[Because of Solar Youth] I get respect in my neighborhood."

Tatyana
Years in Solar Youth: 6



81%
of families indicate that Solar Youth teaches youth to be more sensitive to the feelings of others

"I am a better person to other people and myself, and I believe that I can do anything I put my mind to."

Result...

Youth are Healthy and Happy Stewards of Their Communities and Own Lives, Prepared and Motivated to Succeed.

Randall
Years in Solar Youth: 8



"I learned to balance my time and money better, and gained more patience with youth."

Montrell
Years in Solar Youth: 2



95%
of Interns indicate that Solar Youth prepared them for future employment

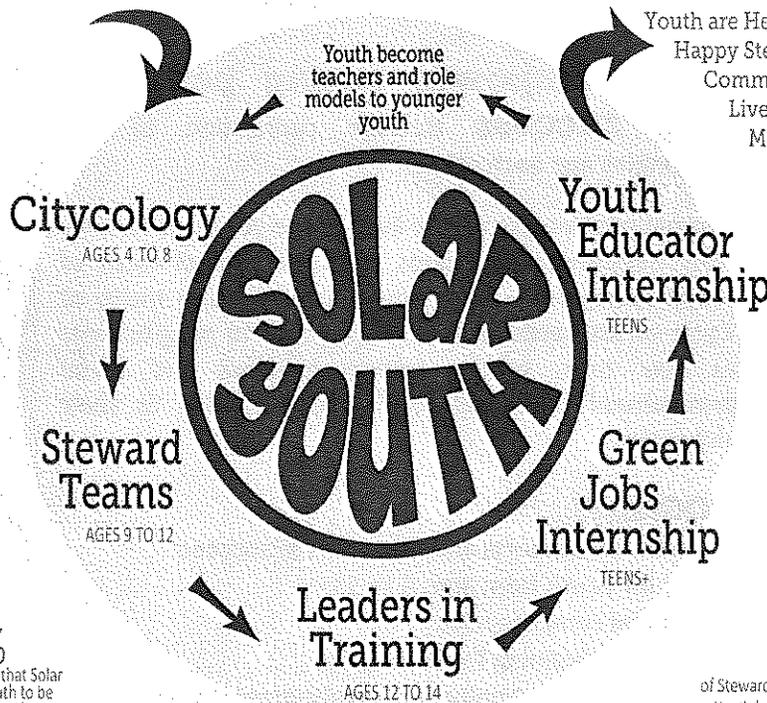
"Solar Youth opened my eyes to community, respect, friendship, and leadership."

Damaris
Years in Solar Youth: 2



92%
of Stewards indicate that Solar Youth helps youth want to do well in school

"I learned so much about the environment and want to learn MORE!"



Solar Youth is a New Haven based youth development organization that empowers youth through environmental exploration, community service and leadership development. Data from fiscal year 2011-2012 feedback.

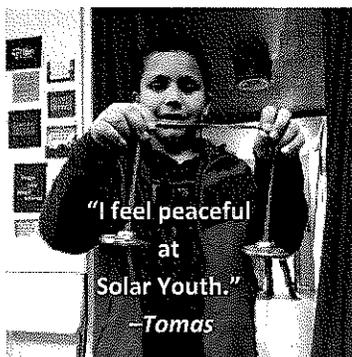
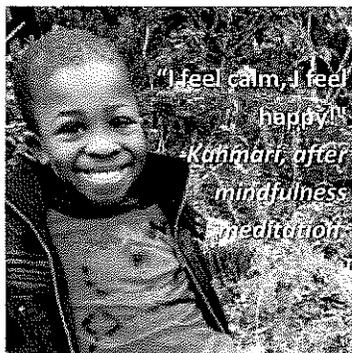
95-100% of Families agreed that because of Solar Youth...

...my child is motivated to do well in school

...my child is more sensitive to the feelings of others

...my child is actively engaged in learning

...my child likes to help others



"I have two grand-kids in Solar Youth. TJ has been in Solar Youth for four years now and he has overcome his shy-ness. He learned to help others more. He is an honor student with help from Solar Youth. Tyjon just joined. He is doing very well in Solar Youth."



-Elizabeth Yarbrough, Grandmother.