

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2016

Regarding HB 5044 AA Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017

I know you have a lot of big decisions to make and I know you probably don't hear a lot of thank you's throughout the day, but I wanted to publicly thank the Legislature, the Governor and DCF for supporting the Homeless Youth Program that is run by the **Connection Inc.** and tell you how much it means to me.

My name is Efrain Torres III, and if you asked me to paint a picture of my life it would look very similar to a rollercoaster – with many ups and downs. When my family arrived to the United States in search of the American Dream it quickly began to deteriorate as a result of my father's problem with substance abuse. During that time, school was difficult, bullying was an everyday nightmare, and my family problems didn't make the situation better, as I had no one I could lean on. Despite these obstacles, I was driven to pursue a better life for myself. When I was in 8th grade I began to develop a passion for the arts and quickly sought out mentors who encouraged me to enter competitions, work on commissioned projects, and donate my talent in creating artwork for neighborhood recovery projects.

In high school much didn't change, bullying was still a problem and my family issues were still a constant reminder of why I wanted to strive for better. In July of 2014 I had to make the difficult decision to leave home. What many people didn't know, was that I was a victim of physical and verbal abuse by a father with a drug addiction. My belongings were taken and pawned to support that addiction on an ongoing basis. Our refrigerator and food pantry were usually empty. I was told I needed to find religion to "fix" my interest in the arts and my sexual orientation.

I was homeless. I stayed with a relative, friends, and a mentor during my senior year of high school. And even with these challenges I think I have done okay. My grades did not suffer. I was active in school activities. But here's the reality. Kids like me don't stand a chance. Our dreams are destroyed. The cycle of poverty continues. We don't become the first in the family to get a college degree. We are simply ignored and forgotten. That is why programs like the Connection's Homeless Youth Program are here.

In the summer of 2015, after graduating high school I was fortunate enough to go through the process of obtaining a stable living space through the **Connection Inc.** I attend the Waterbury University of Connecticut and love every minute of my life. Being a student is my full time job, working at Sears is my part time job, being an apartment owner is a priority. But because programs such as the **Connection Inc.** homeless youth like me have a chance to change the cycle and make a difference, give back, and educate others.

Whichever way you decide to go with this budget, buckets or no buckets, cuts, or rescissions, I just hope you will remember my story when it comes time to make the difficult choices you will have to make.

Thank you again,

Efrain Torres