

Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing: Governor's Proposed Budget
February 16, 2016

Good evening Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today.

My name is Jameson Topper. I am from Bloomfield, and I am a junior at the CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering. I am a member of the twelfth class of the Capitol Region Interdistrict Leadership Academy, otherwise known as CRILA. This year, the CRILA program was unexpectedly defunded by the State Department of Education after twelve successful years as an interdistrict grant program.

So what is CRILA exactly? CRILA is a program designed to turn normal students into better leaders through various stages in the program. The first step involves sending every student into the Rocky Mountains of Colorado for an Outward Bound training program. The participants are constantly pushed to work out of our comfort zones, and to work as a team to solve problems. Being up in 14,000 foot mountains gives everyone a chance to learn to work with each other through obstacles we face on our journey throughout the week. A large piece of advice I took away from the program in Colorado was a small quote one of our counselor asked us every day, and it was simply "Are you a better person today than you were yesterday?" I often find myself faced with challenges, and one thing that I have realized is that for every challenge I am faced with, I become a better person. Every experience I have on a daily basis shapes me to be a better person that next day.

But why is this all important? How does sending kids to Colorado help back home? Well Colorado is just the tip of the iceberg, as our ultimate goal is to create a project together that improves the Greater Hartford area. Last year, CRILA 11 created the "You Matter" campaign, where they helped build awareness for mental health and helped people around Hartford think positively about themselves.

The group of students that is put together every year for CRILA has had a large impact, not only on each other, but also on Hartford. Every alumni from the program we have talked to has discussed how much of an impact the program has had on their lives now. Some of these people, even from the first iteration of the program who are almost twice our age, can all say that they have benefitted from the program, with some even claiming it helped them realize what profession they wanted to study.

This program changes lives every year, and it benefits everyone involved. There is no reason for an end to come of this program. Without it, there would be so many lost opportunities to improve the Greater Hartford area. This program gives students a voice and a way to make a difference, it is an opportunity every person dreams to have. Can you help us fight to continue this essential program and ensure the future of CRILA 13?

Thank you for your time and consideration.