

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 this testimony today.

My name is Kobey Smith. I am from Bloomfield, and I attend the CREC Metropolitan Learning Center. I am here to talk to you about the Capitol Region Interdistrict Leadership Academy, also known as CRILA. CRILA is an interdistrict grant program for students in the Greater Hartford area. This year, the funding for the CRILA program was cut by the State Department of Education. I am asking for your support for CRILA, so that it can continue in the future.

My CRILA experience is by far the most impactful and meaningful experience that I have ever had in my life. The experience that still sticks with me was when my group was hiking a mountain to reach our summit. We woke up at 5am and it was really chilly that day. Most of the group was tired and really unmotivated to even stand up, let alone hike a mountain thousands of feet in the air. I remember seeing the looks on everyone's face. We all looked defeated and unmotivated, but we realized that we had a goal to accomplish and we shouldn't back down from any challenge. I recall vividly being so scared to climb up those steep mountains due to a fear of falling back down and possibly dying if I took a wrong step. What saved me was the great people in my group that surrounded me with inspiration and courage. Never have I been around such a supportive group of people who wanted me to succeed and reach the summit. Being around people who want you to be nothing short of successful really rubs off on an individual.

CRILA also made me a better person mentally. Throughout every experience, especially the mountain climbing, I realized that I could do anything I wanted. It may sound cliché, but this experience really opened my eyes to opportunities. Without this program, I wouldn't have been able to climb mountains for pleasure in honor of the soldiers who climbed them in training for war. Without this program, I wouldn't have been able to experience Mother Nature when I was in the mountains for my solo night. The solo night was by far the most important part of the trip for me, because I was able to realize who I was as a person. On my solo night I had no electronics, no one to talk except myself. The whole purpose was to find yourself in Mother Nature, and I realized throughout that evening and into the next morning that I am not in control of everything that I encounter in life.

CRILA has made me appreciate all of the opportunities that come to me, because the program has turned out to play a big role in my life. If you allow the CRILA program to continue, it will have the same impact on future members. Please help us save CRILA, by funding the program in the future.

Kobey Smith