

Shay Pezzulo - Burlington, CT on CRILA Funding
Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing: Governor's Proposed Budget
February 16th, 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 Shay Pezzulo, and as a student of the twelfth class of CREC's CRILA—the Capitol Interdistrict Leadership Academy—I am testifying in support of the program's funding. Because of the dually public and personal importance of this program, I request that you help CRILA receive the \$80,000 a year that is necessary for this program to continue. CRILA is funded through the State Department of Education as an interdistrict grant. This past year, it was unexpectedly defunded after 12 successful years. This news came as a shock to students, alumni, parents, future students, and the guidance counselors throughout the region who promote the program every year.

One of the most important aspects of CRILA lies directly in its fundamental principles. As a resident of a low-minority town and a student at a Hartford magnet school, I have thoroughly experienced the extraordinary growth that comes with a diverse learning environment. However, many students in the Hartford county region will never experience the same within their own schools. In 12 years, more than 360 students have participated in CRILA, and 9 of them were from my home town of Burlington. By initiating a select group of culturally and economically diverse high school juniors and seniors from 35 towns, CRILA works to utilize the benefits of having social variety to cultivate leadership skills.

Each year of CRILA begins with a weeklong, once-in-a-lifetime leadership and hiking trip to Outward Bound in Leadville, Colorado. Following this trip, we utilize the skills we developed from our week in Colorado and leadership workshops throughout the year in planning our consummatory service project. This year, along with advocating for CRILA's funding, we will be raising money to package meals at St. Francis Hospital.

CRILA has already enormously transformed me not only as a leader, but also as a person. Through the completely unique experiences that CRILA offers—such as preparing us to testify before you all today—I have gained invaluable skills that I will utilize to make the impact that this leadership academy inspires me to do.

These students would seldom be granted such an opportunity outside of CRILA and experience such unique growth as leaders—I know that I wouldn't have been. CRILA nurtures young adults into promising leaders. You, as legislators, have the ability to invest in the future of this world by supporting a program as enriching as CRILA. Thank you for your consideration.