

Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary & Secondary Education
Public Hearing
February 16, 2016

Good Evening Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to give my testimony today.

My name is Jacob Ortiz. I am a Hartford resident, a senior at Two Rivers Magnet High School, and a member of the CRILA 12 family. CRILA is an interdistrict program that takes thirty students from all over Connecticut and brings them together to build and develop their leadership skills. This is a yearlong program starting high in the Colorado Mountains with a week long program meant to create an unbreakable bond amongst the thirty students. The program continues in Connecticut with monthly meeting that include seminars focused on our leadership skills. Finally the program ends with a service project focused on a topic we all feel passionately about.

As of right, now we are the last CRILA family to partake in this life changing experience. We are asking if you could please give \$80,000 to fund our program. This money will used to fund CRILA 13, including the Outward Bound experience. This program would not be the same without the Outward Bound experience, as it is the primary source of growth amongst the participants. During this short week I was able to discover and unlock things about myself that I had no idea I possessed.

As you may suspect, climbing a mountain is very physically demanding, and I surprised myself when I finally reached the summit. I was always a heavy-set person, and I was really scared that I was not going to be able to keep up with the group. My fear was justifiable being that almost every single person in my group was an athlete. Feeling physically unequal was never an issue because as family you are not looking at people's disadvantages, you are only looking at your common goal and how you can support everyone to achieve that goal. The other most difficult part of climbing the mountain is your mental state. You don't know how hard it is to tell yourself to keep going when you have been hiking for three hours with a forty pound backpack and have another three hours until you reach the campsite. Mentally, this journey unlocked something in me that I never knew I had which was determination. Throughout life, I have been able to develop my own motivation, ambition, and drive, but the endurance of completing a task is something I have struggled with. Being on top of that mountain, I had no choice; either I turned back and let the whole team down or I kept going and we finished together. Since returning from Colorado, I have been able to apply this to everything I do. Whether it's finishing a paper or continuing to work on my weight loss, I now can tell myself that if I can summit a mountain so tall, it feels as if I can touch the clouds and I can do anything.

This program has been instrumental in who I am as a person today and who I will be in the future. To date, eleven CRILA families have completed this program, and we will be the twelfth. If the funding to this program doesn't get reinstated, it will be unjust. You would be taking away 30 chances for students to further discover themselves, 30 chances for students to unlock capabilities they never fathomed, 30 chances for students to be leaders, and 30 chances for students to possibly achieve the biggest accomplishments of their life. So senator, representative, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education I leave you with two questions:

1. Do you want to be the people to watch those 30 chances slip away from students?
2. Or, do you want to be the people to liberate another group of 30 amazing future leaders?

Thank you for your consideration and time.