

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 Tate Knapp and I am a senior at Wethersfield High School as well as a member of the twelfth 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.

It is safe to say that becoming a member of this program was one of the best decisions of my life. I was introduced to the academy by my older sister, who was a member of CRILA 11. After her experience in the academy, she refused to let me miss out on my turn to experience the adventure that CRILA provided for her. What was once an unlikely opportunity that I could not see myself being a part of, quickly turned into one of the most impactful experiences of my life.

CRILA is a Leadership Program that brings a group of thirty diverse students from different economic classes, races, and towns across the Hartford County, and puts their leadership skills to the test through a year of physical and mental challenges. The program kicks off with a one week Outward Bound course set in Leadville, Colorado, followed by monthly meetings in which we reflect on our experiences, study leadership qualities, and ultimately work as a group to organize multiple community service projects. Throughout the course, each student is tasked with a ray of physical and emotional challenges, including rock climbing, struggling with homesickness, or difficulty juggling the great responsibility that is CRILA during the school year. However, no matter what the task, as peers, we are able to see each other face each of these challenges, and eventually watch one another succeed.

Personally, my greatest challenge was Solo Night; a night spent in the mountains when we were each assigned our own individual campsite for the night, as we reflected on our week completely alone. That night, my patrol of 10 peers was asked to pack six items including a tarp, sleeping bag, sleeping bag liner, journal, two water bottles, and a sweatshirt. Spread 100 feet apart in dense woods, we each erected individual tarps using natural resources. While in pure solitude I noticed a new calmness about myself. I made rational decisions and independently resolved conflict. During the final hours of Solo Night, I sat on a tree stump and embraced the beautiful surroundings. As I reviewed my journal entries from the week's adventures, it occurred to me that I have become a risk taker and a leader. I climbed and belayed granite cliffs and completed a high ropes course, resulting in the some of the most authentic and inspiring relationships of my life. With use of a compass I was solely responsible for navigating our group up the 13,209 foot summit of Homestake Peak. Me, Tate Knapp, the guy who once believed an experience like this was impossible, who lacked motivation, and who was afraid to take risks or lead the way, felt at peace while completely alone in the Rocky Mountain Range.

I am speaking to you today to express to you how important this program is to the growth and education of me, my sister, and every one of the other 360 CRILA students over the past 12 years. This academy explores an intense, self exploratory curriculum that is simply impossible to be taught in a classroom. I was able to finish my time in Colorado with a new understanding of myself. I was able to enter the school year and the remainder of the course with CRILA having a new found confidence and motivation in my work ethic. When I am an adult, I will be able to look back at this program and recognize it for all of the skills CRILA provided me with. I will continue to take risks and have confidence in taking a leadership role, two skills that were foreign to me prior to this experience. I can only hope that you allow this program and its effect on students to continue.

Please help restore the funding for CRILA.

Thank you for your time and consideration.