

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee- February 18, 2016
Jocelyn Ault, Stratford, CT

Testimony in support of the Governor's Prevention Partnership

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana and Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Committee;

I am writing to support continued funding for the Governor's Prevention Partnership.

In my professional work with CommPACT (family and community engagement initiative in the turnaround school model), as well as in my decades of volunteer commitment to youth and families, I know that funding effective programs with prevention dollars equates to tax savings and fiscal strength. We have to spend our limited resources on what works and what will reduce our expenditures today as well as over time- this is an investment in the infrastructure of our social fabric that pays dividends.

I have had firsthand knowledge of the support provided by the Governor's Prevention Partnership as I have been involved as a volunteer in prevention work in Stratford for the last decade. Thousands of volunteer hours of others, along with mine, have gone to supporting this vital work. The Governor's Prevention Partnership's mission is to *keep Connecticut's youth safe, successful and drug-free today for a stronger workforce tomorrow*. The Partnership provides leadership and services to help schools, communities, youth organizations, colleges and businesses to create and sustain quality programs in three core areas—prevention of underage drinking and substance abuse, safe schools and bullying prevention, and mentoring. The work is informed by the Search Institute Survey work done in each community so that the unique challenges our youth face in their town/city are focused on. This data based approach, along with a commitment to create partnerships for collective impact, is critical to changing the trajectory of the lives of our youth and families.

There is clear evidence that adults make a critical difference in the outcomes of our youth. We must commit to programs which form these vital partnerships. This not only includes parents but also corraling community resources. We must build the resiliency of our youth and families. It is only through leveraging all our resources from different initiatives that we will effectively (in both cost and outcomes) create a healthy and vital Connecticut where people want to live and work. The Governor's Prevention Partnership is a collaborative approach to:

1. Deepen partnerships and expand prevention services to have an even greater impact.
2. Expand the number of positive adult influences in the lives of young people, which helps to reduce incidences of drug and alcohol abuse and the prevalence of bullying in our communities.

I cannot be there in person to testify tonight because I will be at a Bridgeport Prospers meeting with youth and adults in Bridgeport to plan a youth summit on April 1. This work has been informed by the data the Prevention Partnership gathers. The goal is to focus youth (12- 25) on their future, giving them insight into career fields, empowering them to engage in school, and most of all, bring hope and a belief that they can be the captain of their destiny. The work of the Governor's Prevention Partnership is a key collaborator in this initiative.

We cannot operate in silos and be effective. The Governor's Prevention Partnership work is all about collective impact in these key initiatives and supports:

More young people need mentors. Approximately 2,000 youth on waiting lists in CT need a mentor. The Partnership helps to **strengthen existing mentoring programs to serve more youth and provide quality based standards by:**

- Sharing specialized information on serving specific populations of youth for mentors
- Providing best practices, trainings and design & build programs for new and existing programs

- Collecting data and evaluating outcomes of mentoring

Connecticut's substance abuse rates. 36.7% of high school students report drinking in the last 30 days and more than 20% report binge drinking. **The Partnership builds on existing partnerships to reach parents and young people themselves with drug and alcohol prevention information by:**

- Bringing Parenting for Prevention workshops to municipal employees, neighborhood communities, PTAs, etc.
- Presenting and facilitating E3 programming (peer led workshops) in CT schools;
- Raising awareness through the media about risks that young people face and measures adults can take to prevent underage substance abuse;

The effects of bullying can last a lifetime. One in four Connecticut students report being bullied. **The Partnership builds opportunities with individual schools to expand student assistance programs and prevent bullying for youth with disabilities by:**

- Offering trainings and workshops on-site for educators and youth service providers on issues like bullying and harassment discrimination and the law, needs of special populations of youth
- Providing information on cyberbullying for educators and parents
- Assisting with surveying, data collection and evaluation

Dangerous threats continue to affect young people in CT—based on survey's done by the Prevention Partnership, we know that alcohol remains the top two substances of abuse among kids across the state. This spring and summer, Partnership staff surveyed 125 youth in 10 focus groups around the state. Those youth confirmed that perception of harm is low, with kids thinking that having a few drinks or smoking marijuana to relax is no big deal. Youth report to us that access to alcohol comes easily, with many getting it from friends or family members or even their own parents, in spite of strong social host laws in effect in our state.

Another significant threat to our kids comes in the form of prescription drug misuse and heroin abuse. Research shows us that many people using heroin start with prescription drugs, moving on to heroin when after they become addicted to prescription pain relievers. More than 11% of CT's youth report using a prescription drug for something other than its intended purpose.

When we look at the story lines of rape, abuse and accidents, we find alcohol or drug use so often entwined. These are costly public health issues.

I invite you to the Freshman Forum being held in Stratford on March 30 from 7-8:30. It is the kind of work that is being done in communities, with the leadership and support of the data and technical expertise of the Governor's Prevention Partnership. It is being held at Bunnell High School. This is the 3rd year. It has been successful in both educating students and families as well as starting difficult conversations that will save not only lives but prevent injurious behaviors. Our goal is also to have parents reflect on their own behaviors around drinking and driving, drug use and ensuring they create an environment where they are not inadvertently sanctioning or providing drugs and alcohol to youth (medicine cabinets and beer in the refrigerator!).

Prevention is cost effective - Effective prevention strategies across the lifespan means less use of expensive treatment and intervention services later in life. SAMHSA estimates that for every \$1 spent on prevention programs for addictions and mental illness, there is a \$2 to \$10 savings in health costs, criminal and juvenile justice costs, educational costs, and lost productivity.

I request you look at spending our precious revenue in areas which will promote a healthy and productive Connecticut. Thank you for your commitment to our communities.

Jocelyn Ault
434 Laughlin Rd., Stratford, CT

