Testimony for Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee
Public Hearing re: HB 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

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The Governor’s Prevention Partnership
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Good evening distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Monique Price-Taylor. I am here on behalf of The Governor’s Prevention Partnership as the Program Manager for the E3: Encourage, Empower, Engage Program and the Statewide Youth Leadership Board in which we work with diverse youth across the state in public and private schools. I am honored to submit this testimony in support of State funding for prevention resources for Connecticut’s youth. I am here today as an advocate for prevention initiatives that empower youth to voice their concerns about underage drinking, prescription drugs, and e-cigarettes or vaping.

Underage drinking and substance abuse misuse are currently the top substances misused by youth across the state. Our recent E3 Program survey of 593 youth in schools and communities across Connecticut confirms what research has shown us – that youth perception of the harm in using alcohol and marijuana is low. Youth in Connecticut tend to think that underage drinking and smoking marijuana is no big deal. According to an article written on the effectiveness of youth outcomes from youth.gov, “Young people who are surrounded by a variety of opportunities for positive encounters engage in less risky behavior and ultimately show evidence of higher rates of successful transitions into adulthood.”

Through our programs to empower youth, we now have 130 peer leaders statewide who are committed to creating a change in the perception of harm of substance misuse in their schools and communities. These young people daily experience the impact that substance abuse has on their families and communities. Often young people looking for a way to escape will misuse substances as a way of coping. Programs like E3 and the Statewide Leadership Board provide youth with leadership opportunities and hope through education and healthy decision-making strategies that cultivate healthy communities.

Prevention programs that place an emphasis on youth development activate and empower the youth voice that is often overshadowed by adult thoughts and perceptions. We know that young people are concerned about the wellbeing of their peers and want to act on those concerns through service. I think about the youth in Bridgeport at Kolbe Cathedral High School that submitted a written testimony on the impact E3 has had on their school community. These young people are working on an impaired driving PSA with a centralized focus on “Living Life on Repeat.” I think about the youth at Cromwell High School, who have addressed the issue of academic pressure leading to substance misuse by creating a campaign, “Putting You First” to help other students navigate the challenges they’ll face academically. I think about the youth in Old Saybrook, who are educating their teachers and peers about the harms of vaping. Prevention resources are essential to transform communities in Connecticut.
The 2017 CT Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows us a sobering reality: in the last 30 days, 30.4% of youth consumed alcohol and 20.4% smoked marijuana, proving that there is still so much work to be done. This year, The Governor’s Prevention Partnership made tremendous strides in supporting young people to make healthy decisions. With support from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Department of Transportation, we sustained the E3: Encourage, Empower, Engage program—an alcohol and substance abuse prevention program run for youth by youth in 9 schools and communities reaching an estimated 2,000 students.

The sense of urgency to educate youth and change the perception of harm caused by substance misuse is evident. The ability to provide prevention resources allows The Governor’s Prevention Partnership the opportunity to develop cohesive, accessible, community-based strategies to help prevent early substance misuse among youth in Connecticut.

Youth-focused programs are truly maximized when programs are implemented with fidelity. Money, personnel, and resources are required to sustain and support effective prevention programs. Effective prevention strategies early on mean less use of expensive treatment and intervention services later in life. SAMHSA estimates that for every $1 spent on prevention programs for addiction and mental illness, there is a $2 to $10 savings on health costs, criminal and juvenile justice costs, educational costs, and lost productivity.

On behalf of Connecticut’s youth, The Governor’s Prevention Partnership would like to thank you for your past support of our prevention efforts, and we ask for your continued investment in prevention as underage drinking and other drugs continue to be a concern.

We have an obligation to all young people in Connecticut to invest in their healthy futures, to ensure our state has a healthy future as well. The Governor’s Prevention Partnership would be delighted to provide services in your community, please feel free to contact us; my information is included at the end of my testimony.

Thank you,

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