

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rep. Mihaly and the House Committee on Appropriations

FR: Rep. Demrow

CC: Reps. Small, McCann, and Priestley

DT: March 1, 2023

RE: FY24 Budget increase request to \$650,000.00 for MENTOR Vermont

Thank you for your note asking for more information regarding considering an FY24 budget increase request of \$650,000 in base funding for MENTOR Vermont. This line in the budget resides within the DCF/FSD budget.

Starting in 2007, MENTOR Vermont received **\$250,000** from the Vermont Department of Children and Families Family Services Division from their General Grant Pool. In 2011, that State grant was reduced to **\$170,000** where it has remained. For the last sixteen years, MENTOR Vermont has worked with the State on this small grant and fundraised for the bulk of the funding to provide this life-changing service.

Prior to the COVID pandemic there were **2,000 mentor-mentee matches** across the entire state. In 2022, MENTOR Vermont provided *\$306,000* in grants to 22 mentoring agencies whose overall combined budgets were *\$3,000,000* - for **1,300 matches**. MENTOR Vermont used the \$170,000 state budget appropriation, matched it with its own fundraising, and was able to provide 10% of the money needed to get 1,300 matches.

Just to get back to the pre-pandemic level, or 2019 numbers, MENTOR Vermont would need to create **700 more matches**. The national average **yearly cost** of a mentor-mentee match is around \$2,000 - in Vermont it is slightly higher at closer to **\$2,450 per match**. To get back to pre-COVID levels, or 2019 numbers, it will cost us, in Vermont, roughly **\$4,900,000**.

Date	Matches	Total Cost	State Funding
2022	1300	3,000,000.00	170,000.00
FY24 Request	2000	4,900,000.00	650,000.00

We feel this is a modest request and thank you for your consideration. If MENTOR Vermont receives a \$650,000 appropriation that would make up roughly 13.25% of the total funding needed to achieve the 2,000 matches where we can start to better meet the need of our youth. MENTOR Vermont and each mentoring program will need to fundraise to bring in the remaining 86.75%.

Without the funding increase *the \$170,000.00 will only meet 3.5% of the funding needs.*

DCF is fully aware of the request for additional funding and has encouraged MENTOR Vermont to pursue an increase in funding through the legislature. DCF expressed that they were limited with their budget requests this year but if MENTOR Vermont is able to secure a higher level of funding through the legislative budgeting processes, they would welcome the increased funding to support youth mentoring. MENTOR Vermont has a long-held relationship with DCF and the ability with this requested increased investment to meet the mutual goal of returning to the pre-pandemic level of mentor matches.

Additionally, MENTOR Vermont has met with Interim Commissioner Harry Chen and is in the process of requesting a meeting with the new Commissioner Chris Winters.

The Need

Everywhere we turn we are hearing that Vermont systems are at their breaking points, including [schools](#) and [parents](#). Teachers are burned out with little resources, parents have nowhere to turn, and hospitals and health systems are suffering from a lack of staff and capacity to meet the ever-growing needs of our kids. Collectively we must do everything we can to respond to the crises at hand and expand support for mental health and well-being to Vermont youth.

And indeed, the FY24 Governor's Recommended budget is investing in addressing the crisis, with funding for youth inpatient psychiatric beds, suicide hotlines and mobile crisis units. **But we also need to invest in prevention** to help support our kids before they are in crisis.

Mentoring is a preventive tool, shown to have proven mental health benefits. By employing this tool, youth have been shown to be more likely to attend school, participate in sports and community activities, and are less likely to use electronic vapor products or to make a suicide plan. [MENTOR Vermont's](#) vision is to close the mentoring gap and drive equity through quality mentoring relationships so every young person in Vermont has the supportive mentoring relationships they need to grow and thrive.

Every Vermont youth deserves access to an adult they can trust. Despite critical youth mental health needs, and the proven social and emotional benefits of mentoring, State investment in mentoring has not increased since 2007, it decreased in 2011, and has been level-funded for the last 11 years at an abysmal rate. Currently, post-pandemic mentor-mentee matches are down by 35% and waitlists exist across Vermont. **I urge you to invest \$650,000 in mentoring to help meet the needs of Vermont youth.**

"Mentoring is foundation-building," said Kimberley Diemond, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters Vermont, a statewide mentoring agency. "But because it's not crisis-oriented, we don't get the merit we deserve. We need support." Seven Days article, [Mentoring Programs Help Vermont Youths But Desperately Need Volunteers](#)

During the COVID pandemic, many young people experienced social disconnection, higher levels of stress and trauma and increased substance use. Mentoring relationships provide children and adolescents individualized, one-on-one attention and support, a primary component of pandemic recovery. These connections are a critical tool to help ensure young Vermonters have the supportive relationships they need to prosper and grow.

Mentoring helps youth, benefits the community members who volunteer as mentors, and offers an impactful balm for the increasing disconnection we all feel. We know that youth who feel like they matter to their community thrive and that this is one of the strongest protective factors for young Vermonters. Mentees continually report that their mentor helped them feel like they matter.

VT Mentoring Data 2022

- 91% of mentees expressed "my mentor makes me feel like I matter."
- 89% of mentees expressed "having a mentor has made a positive difference in my life."
- 95% of **mentors** expressed "having a mentee has made a positive difference in my life."

Youth need supportive adults in their lives now more than ever. By increasing the quality and quantity of safe and effective youth-adult mentoring relationships in places where young people live, work, learn and play, we can help address the inequities of access plaguing Vermont youth.

Currently, 22 out of the 35 mentoring agencies across the state receive grants through MENTOR Vermont to help support their programs. These Vermont Mentoring Grants are the only mentoring-specific source of grant funding in Vermont and typically represent around 20% of a mentoring program's budget. Mentoring program coordinators, who mostly work part-time, have

to fundraise locally to raise the other 80% of their budget. This time spent fundraising means less time program staff are able to dedicate to the recruitment, screening, training, onboarding, and matching youth with caring consistent mentors. **We can do better for our youth for a relatively small investment.**

In fact, research from national mentoring organizations demonstrate that for every dollar invested in effective mentoring programs, there is a return of \$2.72. Youth mentoring is a proven positive youth development method, providing a caring, consistent adult outside of a young person's immediate family that they can turn to for support. Mentoring relationships can lead to a greater feeling of connection to the community, a reduction in depressive symptoms, and an increase in future education and career aspirations. According to the National Mentoring Resource Center, mentoring can also act as a "protective factor." Protective factors, which "may be seen as positive countering events" to adverse childhood experiences (ACES), are "characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact" (SAMHSA). **By investing in mentoring today the State can avoid the downstream impact to youth mental health and increased costs associated with acute needs.**

Thank you so much for your consideration. Please reach out for more questions.