



MENTOR
VERMONT

To: House Education Committee
From: MENTOR Vermont
Date: April 13, 2022
Re: S.197, Mental Health Support in Schools



Madame Chair Webb and Members of the House Education Committee,

On behalf of the 39 Vermont youth mentoring agencies that MENTOR Vermont works with, we are writing to urge your support for **S.197**, a bill that aims to provide grants to organizations that can expand mental health and well-being to Vermont Youth.

Mentoring During COVID-19

With Vermont students' mental health needs surging and educators seeking more social and emotional supports in school, mentoring is more important now than ever. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many young people experienced social disconnection, higher levels of stress and trauma and increased substance use. Mentoring relationships are needed now more than ever, but compared to pre-pandemic, the number of mentee-mentor matches is down 47% across the state. Given the long-term effects of disconnection and trauma brought by this pandemic, we must move collectively to do everything we can to ensure young Vermonters have the supportive relationships they need to prosper and grow.

Vermont youth mentoring programs are eager to ramp up mentor recruitment efforts to meet youth needs and recover mentee-mentor match numbers to pre-pandemic levels. The grants included in S.197 could allow our mentoring programs to expand our services that already meet the criteria of "Using evidence-based strategies to address student social, emotional, and mental health and wellness needs."

Here is feedback from youth mentees expressed during the 2020-2021 school year:

- 95% of youth mentees shared, "My mentor is someone I can depend on."
- 86% expressed, "My mentor is someone with whom I can share my feelings related to COVID-19."
- 95% said, "Having a mentor has made a positive difference in my life."
- 96% shared, "My mentor makes me feel like I matter."

"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."

MENTOR Vermont was established in 2013

at the request of youth mentoring organizations across the state, to advocate for equitable funding and resources for all programs. Over the last eight years, MENTOR Vermont has provided support to mentoring programs across the state. Strengthening the quality and broadening the reach of youth mentoring relationships in our communities.

Mentoring Programs Support Students Social & Emotional Health

Here are the areas where mentoring programs fit the criteria in the current proposed language in S.197 that would provide grantees with funding to supports both school-based and community-based programs.

The criteria for the grants include:

- Using evidence-based strategies to address student social, emotional, and mental health and wellness needs
- Specially trained staff providing one-on-one and small group supports and resilience sessions for children and youth, including addressing specific needs such as suicide prevention, social isolation, anxiety, and substance use
- Families receiving assistance in navigating behavioral health resources in their communities
- Providing opportunities for children and youth to participate in activities that heal and prevent social isolation, such as outdoor activities, art therapy, recreation, and time in nature
- Collecting data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the supports and interventions

In response to MENTOR Vermont's COVID-19 Response Survey in the summer of 2020, 74% of youth mentees expressed that "my relationship with my mentor has made me feel less alone during the pandemic." Herrera, et al., (2013) concluded that the strongest benefit from mentoring, across risk groups, was a reduction in depressive symptoms. This is significant because of the correlation between these symptoms and substance abuse (Conner, et. al., 2009).

Mentoring can act as a protective factor (National Mentoring Resource Center, no date). Protective factors, which "may be seen as positive countering events," to ACES are "characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact." (SAMHSA, no date). By being a consistent adult presence in a young person's life, mentors can share their life experiences, and help a young person navigate challenges, while also encouraging them to explore their strengths and interests.

References:

Conner, Kenneth R., Martin Piquart, and Stephanie A. Gamble. (Sept. 2009). Meta-Analysis Of Depression And Substance Use Among Individuals With Alcohol Use Disorders. *J. Subst Abuse Treat.* 37(2): 127-137. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4864601/>.

Herrera, Carla, David L. DuBois, and Jean Grossman. (Feb 2013). The Role of Risk: Mentoring Experiences and Outcomes for Youth with Varying Risk Profiles. Retrieved from <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/role-risk>.

National Mentoring Resource Center. (No date). Risk and Protective Factors. Retrieved from <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/toolkit/item/270-risk-and-protectivefactors.html>.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (No date). Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies. Adverse Childhood Experiences. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/>.

Thank you for your consideration. Please reach out to Chad Butt, Executive Director of MENTOR Vermont, if you have questions. chad@mentorvt.org

