

February 23, 2023

Dear Esteemed House Committee on Appropriations Colleagues,

We keep hearing that Vermont schools and parents are at their breaking points. Teachers are burned out, parents have nowhere to turn, and health systems are overwhelmed by trying to meet the ever-growing needs of our kids.

Indeed, the FY24 Governor's Recommended budget is addressing the crisis with funding for youth inpatient psychiatric beds, suicide hotlines and mobile crisis units. **But we also need to invest in prevention**, before our kids are in crisis. With your financial help, MENTOR Vermont could do so much more to provide an invaluable service.

Mentoring is a preventive tool with inarguable mental health benefits. Youth with mentors are **more likely** to attend school, participate in sports and community activities, and are **less likely** to use harmful substances or make suicide plans.

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."

Every Vermont youth deserves access to an adult they can trust. State investment in mentoring has not increased since 2007. In fact, it decreased in 2011 (from \$250,000 to \$170,000), and has been level-funded for the last 11 years. Currently, post-pandemic mentor-mentee matches are down by 35% and waitlists exist across Vermont. **We urge you to invest \$650,000 in mentoring to help meet the needs of Vermont youth.**

During the COVID pandemic, many young people experienced social disconnection, higher levels of stress and trauma and increased substance use. Plenty of research and anecdotal evidence indicates youth need supportive adults in their lives now more than ever. Mentoring relationships provide children and adolescents individualized, one-on-one attention and support, a primary component of pandemic recovery.

Prior to the COVID pandemic there were 2,000 matches across the entire state, now there are 1,300. MENTOR Vermont strives and, unfortunately, struggles to close the

mentoring gap, bringing quality mentoring relationships to every young person in Vermont who could use the support they need to grow and thrive.

Currently, 22 out of the 35 mentoring agencies across the state receive grants through MENTOR Vermont, the only mentoring-specific source of grant funding in Vermont, which typically represents around 20% of a mentoring program's budget. Mentoring program coordinators, who mostly work part-time, have to fundraise to raise the other 80% of their budget, which means less time for dedicating to the recruitment, screening, training, onboarding, and matching youth with mentors.

The Vermont average yearly cost for a mentor-mentee is about \$2,450 per match. To get back to pre-COVID levels, it will cost Vermont roughly \$4,900,000. In 2022, MENTOR Vermont provided \$306,000 in grants to agencies with overall combined budgets of \$3,000,000. In addition to \$170,000 from the State, MENTOR Vermont's fundraising was able to provide only 10% of the money needed to get just 1,300 matches. **We can do better for our youth for a relatively small investment.**

Research from national mentoring organizations demonstrate every dollar invested in effective mentoring programs has a return of \$2.72. **By investing in mentoring today the State can avoid the downstream impact to youth mental health and increased costs associated with acute needs.**

"Mentoring is foundation-building," said Kimberley Diamond, 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](#)

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

Most sincerely,

Rep. Carl Demrow

Rep. Taylor Small

Rep. Kate McCann

Rep. Monique Priestley