

mfoote@dreamprogram.org

4:26 PM (4 hours ago)

to jkitchel, aperchlik, rawestman, rstarr, rsears, pbaruth, vlyons, Chad, jill

Greetings Senate Appropriations Committee,

I am reaching out to ask you to support an increase in state appropriations for youth mentoring.

My name is Mike Foote and I direct [The DREAM Program](#), a statewide mentoring organization that serves close to 300 Vermont youth living in low-income households. We operate in Addison, Bennington, Windsor, Chittenden, Franklin, and Lamoille counties. We are also currently piloting our program in 7 high schools, serving an additional 50 high school students and their elementary school mentees.

While we all hear regular reports about the COVID-19 related learning gaps, mental health challenges and other negative pandemic impacts, our staff and volunteer mentors are experiencing them every day on the ground. We have had to invest additional financial resources in behavior trainings for our mentors and staff to navigate an unprecedented volume of behavior challenges. We are also recording a major increase in serious mental health issues (just last week, 3 DREAM mentees shared with their mentors that they are having suicidal ideations). And we have seen a significant uptick in families reaching out to us for mentors (requests that we are unable to fill right now given our capacity limitations).

The silver lining is that the mentoring relationships we do have in place are providing powerful protective factors for the youth involved. A wealth of research has shown how youth mentoring supports positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes. This research is corroborated by the many stories we hear from caregivers about how important the mentors are to their children.

With additional investment in youth mentoring, we (and other mentoring organizations across the state) would be able to scale our work to better meet the unprecedented demand.

We celebrated hearing the news that the House included \$650,000 for youth mentoring in their budget. I understand that you are weighing many important and sometimes competing budget priorities. I urge you to support youth mentoring at this level at a minimum.

I also want to highlight an important mentoring-umbrella organization in Vermont, MENTOR Vermont, who has worked tirelessly to strengthen the mentoring movement, including providing funding support, conducting high-quality trainings and other convenings, and advancing and sharing the growing research base. With your additional investment and their steady leadership, I am confident that the mentoring movement can grow to meet the need, and ensure that children across the state have the relational support they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and your dedication to our wonderful state,
Mike

Mike Foote

Empowerment Officer | The DREAM Program, Inc.

(He, Him, His)

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Pam Quinn

12:13 PM (9 hours ago)

to jkitchel, Andrew, rawestman, rstarr, rsears, pbaruth, vlyons, me, Jill

Senate Appropriations Committee,

I wanted to reach out personally to thank you all for including \$650,000 in the budget for youth mentoring. As a person who has worked with youth for over 25 years, I can tell you that supporting youth has always been complex, but in our ever changing world, life is only getting more complicated for families, youth, schools, and communities. I know there is no one golden answer to how we can best support the needs of our youth, but I can say with confidence that mentoring is a very effective and inexpensive piece of the puzzle for our communities.

At [Twinfield](#), we are so fortunate to have a vibrant program that has strengthened our communities of Marshfield and Plainfield since 2009. However, if I was able to spend less time writing grants and fundraising, I could spend more time recruiting and training new volunteers, supporting current matches, and helping youth find the connections in their community that they need to feel supported and valued. Our kids need this now more than ever. With an increase in funding from the state, I could do just that - spend my time doing what I am good at; connecting kids to caring adults, providing leadership opportunities for our teens, and making intergenerational connections in our community that benefit everyone.

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, I urge you to keep mentoring on your priority list as you have to make cuts to the budget - if not for programs like mine, but for the areas of Vermont that have an understaffed program, or don't have a mentoring program at all. If my community is lucky enough to support a mentoring program, every community in Vermont should have that same opportunity. As you know, this is not the case.

Thanks for all your work you are all doing, I can only imagine how complicated this process is. If you want more information, please reach out with any questions. I am always happy to talk about the importance of mentoring for our youth, communities and mentor volunteers.

Sincerely,
Pam Quinn

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Pam Quinn, Program Director

Pronouns: she/her - [Why Pronouns Matter](#)

[Twinfield Together Mentoring Program](#)

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Beth Wallace

Tue, Apr 18, 1:56 PM (1 day ago)

to jkitchel, aperchlik, rawestman, rstarr, rsears, pbaruth, vlyons

Dear VT Senate Appropriations committee,

I am writing in support of increased state appropriations to support mentoring relationships for children and youth in the state of Vermont. I know this is a big year for appropriations (I hear about it in the regular reports from my legislators) and that there is a demand for increased appropriations on many fronts. I am so grateful to you for doing the hard work to balance it all out and provide the resources needed to help Vermonters thrive. Thank you.

In the wake of the pandemic, children are more in need than ever of loving, safe, support both emotionally and academically. This is the right time to invest in their future. We know that supporting children pays off down the road in academic success, further education, prevention of substance abuse, stable families and workforce, less incarceration, and so on and on. It's my understanding that the House of Representatives included \$650,000 for youth mentoring in their budget. It's my hope that the Senate will invest in Vermont children and youth at the same level.

I'm the director of Everybody Wins! Vermont, a statewide, school-based, reading mentoring program which pre-pandemic matched over 600 children per year with adult volunteer mentors who came to read with them one-on-one every week at school. Like many organizations, Everybody Wins! is recovering from the pandemic and rebuilding. This year we are serving almost 300 children in 14 schools, compared with 600 children in 21 schools in 19-20 (and 94 children in 20-21).

Everybody Wins! works closely with Mentor VT, which has provided evidence-based resources to assure the quality of our mentoring program, and other ongoing support and resources.

We typically receive between \$45,000 and \$50,000 per year in our Vermont Mentoring Grant, which is about 15% -20% of our overall budget. These funds are essential for us in leveraging other funding. The flexibility of this funding allows us to serve small rural towns like Vershire, Barton, and Bridport—all towns where we have had flourishing mentoring programs. In those small towns, the program is extraordinarily successful at connecting children with community members, and the community with their school—for example, in Tunbridge, every child in grades 3-5 is able to have a reading mentor, and 90% of them choose to do so.

Although Everybody Wins! typically serves 20+ schools per year, that is less than 10% of the elementary schools in the state. There is a huge unmet need for this kind of community support for children. In almost every school we serve, there are long waiting lists of children who want to take part. In only 2 of the 21 schools have we been able to serve every child who wants a mentor. Children and youth are waiting for support in every mentoring program I'm aware of. Recruiting, training, and supporting volunteer mentors is a significant and essential part of program cost.

In the next year, Everybody Wins! will expand programs in St. Johnsbury, Waterbury, Montpelier, and Middlebury; re-open programs that have been closed because of the pandemic in Burlington, West Fairlee, Tunbridge, and Barre City; and open new programs in schools that haven't been announced yet. Our ability to continue to rebuild and expand to serve more children and more communities is dependent on funding.

Thank you so much for your hard work on behalf of Vermonters. Good luck with your discussions and decisions. I know it's not easy.

Best,
Beth Wallace

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Beth Wallace
she/her
Executive Director
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