



Senate Health & Welfare Committee  
 FY24 Budget Request  
 MENTOR Vermont  
 March 31, 2023

Dear Chair Lyons and Senate Health and Welfare Committee members,

Thank you for considering MENTOR Vermont’s FY24 Budget increase request of \$480,000.00 bringing the total State funding to \$650,000.00. Thanks to the advocacy of the [House Human Services Committee](#), and being listed as a high priority in their FY24 Budget Recommendations, and the support of the House Appropriations Committee, this increase is reflected in the House-passed budget and we ask for your support.

**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.

**The Numbers**

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 State. In 2022, MENTOR Vermont provided **\$306,000** in grants to 22 mentoring agencies whose overall combined budgets were **\$3.0 million** to support **1,300 matches**. MENTOR Vermont took the \$170,000 from the State, 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, we 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 **\$4.9 million**.

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

**Thank you for your consideration. If we were awarded the \$650,000 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%.**

*If we do not get this increase the \$170,000.00 will only meet 3.5% of the funding needs.*

### **The Need**

Everywhere we turn we hear Vermont systems are at their breaking points, including [schools](#) and [parents](#). Teachers are burned out with little resources, parents don't know where 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. ***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.

*"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](#)*

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."

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.**

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 go to [mentorvt.org](https://mentorvt.org) and reach out with any questions.**

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