

July 23, 2024

119K Commission Testimony

Good evening my name is Taniqua Huguley-Chaplin and I am the Director of Economic Mobility Initiatives at the United Way of Central and Northeastern CT.

In one of my many roles at UW, I have the great pleasure of working with young adults in the city and several organizations in this room. One of my most recent projects has been creating and implementing the Navigation Hub in the North End in partnership with Capital Workforce Partners, The Village, the City of Hartford, Young Legends, and Ascend. The Navigation is a place-based youth engagement and service strategy targeting Hartford youth ages 14-29 who have been disconnected from education and the labor force. The Hub is currently in a pilot stage.

The Hub model brings together Career Navigators, Family Navigators, and youth leaders from multiple agencies to coordinate youth and young adult intake and referral services at a specified venue in the North Hartford Promise Zone area – currently in the Artists Collective. Yes, this is a real thing - multiple agencies working together under one roof to provide our young people with services. Though the hub has only been in full operation for less than two months, it's proven to be a much-needed resource for our young people. As mentioned, we have young adults working alongside navigators, giving them a job, yes, but also allowing them to connect with their peers. This was made possible because we valued the opinions and thoughts of young adults. They were a part of the hub design from the beginning.

Throughout the years of working with young adults, they have consistently asked for a safe space that provides hang-out and lounging areas, career and job training resources, social services, and programming space. I believe this type of resource would save the lives of many of our young people – it saved mine. Growing up in NYC the largest housing projects in North America, Queensbridge Houses, and going to school in South Jamaica Queens many of my friends and family members would have been identified as disconnected. If there were free hubs that had staff that looked like them who assisted helped them with tutoring, and provided mentoring, job training, programs, sports, and social services they would not have been in the streets, in prison, or dead. I was fortunate enough to be able to enroll in a program called Legal Outreach, which served as the ideal youth hub that I talked about. Though it was a structured program focusing on college, the general concept of providing all of the necessary things to thrive was housed in one place. For example, young people were connected to mentors, kids received tutors, and we were connected to job and internship opportunities. It has happened in other places – it can happen here in CT.

My recommendation is that we continue to support and invest in the Navigation Hub and work on expanding this hub model to provide the ideal hub space for our youth and young adults. Just recently, the city of Hartford took the steps to host late-night gym hours. Imagine if we were able to combine the resources and services in community centers and the hub. We would be able to truly provide our young people with the wrap-around support and services they need, ultimately being one of many community resources working to prevent disconnection.

My second recommendation is to keep youth and young adults part of all discussions and implementation and decision making processes that would genuinely allow them to exercise their power.

Thank you for your time.

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