



August 22, 2024

The Honorable Mayor Elinor Carbone, Andrew Ferguson, and Josh Brown
Co-Chairs, CCM 119K Commission, c/o Connecticut Conference of Municipalities

Re: raising the salaries of youth development professionals as a strategy for re-engaging
disengaged and disconnected youth

Dear Mayor Carbone, Mr. Ferguson, and Mr. Brown:

We, the executive directors and CEOs of nonprofits Catalyst CT, Compass Youth Collaborative, Connecticut Violence Intervention Program, Domus, Forge City Works, Roca, and Our Piece of the Pie, appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to the 119k Commission.

Our organizations work with disengaged and disconnected young people in Stamford, Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford. We implore you to add the professionalization of youth development professionals (YDPs) to your recommendations of what it will take to re-engage and re-connect 60,000 disengaged and disconnected young people across our state.

As we have heard at every one of the public testimony sessions held so far, the key to re-engagement is relationships. As the executive directors and CEO's of nonprofits working with the most disengaged and disconnected young people across Connecticut, we know—without a doubt—that the youth development professionals we employ are experts at building relationships with young people that others in our communities have been unable to do. They can do this because of their lived experience, combined with the training, coaching, and supervision our organizations provide. Recently at a family focus group, a parent commented “My (child) loves their (youth development professional) in a way they don’t even love members of their own family.”

Despite the crucial role these individuals play in our ability to engage and connect with these young people, the specialized skills required to do these jobs well, and the years of training and lived experience required, these positions are undervalued in our society. **Thus, our organizations are not funded at a level that allows us to compensate these employees as they deserve, given the significant impact their work has on individuals, families, and communities.** Many YDPs would remain in these positions for the duration of their careers if able to do so financially. This would elevate the field: having people in these roles as a profession, rather than requiring them to eventually find other employment that allows them to live comfortably in Connecticut.

The starting salary for YDPs in our nonprofits is between \$35,000 and \$50,000¹. According to the Economic Policy Institute², a Connecticut family (1 adult and 2 children) must earn the following amount annually to “attain a modest yet adequate standard of living”:

- \$143,315 in the Stamford/Norwalk metro area.
- \$122,716 in Bridgeport.
- \$112,841 in New Haven.
- \$108,624 in Hartford.

According to that same report, annual housing costs for these cities/metro regions are:

- \$30,756 in the Stamford/Norwalk metro area.
- \$19,824 in Bridgeport.
- \$18,780 in New Haven.
- \$17,988 in Hartford.

Even if YDPs want to make a profession of this role, it is impossible to do so without tremendous personal and family sacrifice.

We recommend the following:

1. Because of the critical role this position plays in the success of disconnected and disengaged youth, CCM should elevate this as one of the most important strategies to re-engage the 60,000 young people they are committed to re-connecting over the next 10 years.
2. Committee members should actively support nonprofits in conversations with funders about ensuring organizations working with this target population are funded to levels ensuring they can provide employees wages allowing them to—at a bare minimum—“attain a modest yet adequate standard of living”. Having your support in these discussions, as a third party who doesn’t directly benefit, would be very powerful.
3. Discussions that help stakeholders understand the importance of long-term, sustained funding: Helping disengaged and disconnected young people develop trusting relationships, change mindsets, form new behaviors, face and address trauma, and achieve meaningful progress takes time. The path to self-sufficiency for these particular young people is not a short one. We need sufficient time to stabilize our young people before expecting them to meet long-term outcomes such as employment retention. When nonprofits must divert precious resources away from our core activities and into administrative work such as grant writing, we have less time and fewer resources to set multi-year targets and develop and test strategies.

Thank you for your attention and focus on the 119,000 young people across our state who are disconnected or are at risk of being disconnected. We strongly believe that with increased funding to fairly compensate youth development professionals working with these young people, every one of them can be connected and successful.

¹ One of the seven organizations here offers a starting salary of \$60,000.

² **Source:** Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator, January 2024. Data are in 2023 dollars.

Sincerely,



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