Talking Points on MENTOR’s Legislative Priorities for Capitol Hill Day 2020

1 in 3 young people will reach the age of 19 without having a mentor. This is the mentoring gap in the United States.

Youth Mentoring Program Grant

- The Youth Mentoring Program is housed at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) within the U.S. Department of Justice.
- The program is funded by the Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations subcommittee in the House and Senate.
- The youth mentoring program supports the implementation, delivery, and enhancement of evidence-based mentoring services to improve outcomes and ensure that at-risk, or underserved youth have the supports they need to thrive.
- The grant funds direct service youth mentoring programs serving at-risk and high-risk young people implementing evidence-based practices and allows programs throughout the nation to shrink the current mentoring gap.
- The OJJDP grant also funds the National Mentoring Resource Center, an online research and evidence-based practice hub that offers no-cost quality training and technical assistance to mentoring programs across the country to improve their practice and desired outcomes for young people.
- In FY20, the grant was funded at $97 million. While this is good news, unfortunately, the total federal investment in quality youth mentoring programs has fallen in the past decade, dropping dramatically from its highest funding level of more than $177 million in FY09.
- MENTOR calls on Congress to fund the OJJDP youth mentoring program grant at a minimum of $120 million in FY21.

H.R. 3061, The Foster Youth Mentoring Act

- The Foster Youth Mentoring Act is a bipartisan bill that would authorize funding to provide support to mentoring programs that serve foster youth. Programs would be eligible to receive funds to support the expansion of their services to more youth in foster care and to improve services for current foster youth in their programs.
- Youth in foster care face many challenges including disruptions in education, stable and permanent familial connections, and often lack personal relationships with consistent caring adults who provide them emotional, educational, and professional support.
- The bill would ensure that mentoring organizations participating in the grant program are currently utilizing or developing quality mentoring standards to ensure best practices in the screening of volunteers, matching process, and successful mentoring relationships.
- Programs receiving grant funds would provide training to adult volunteers who serve as mentors to foster youth to assure that they are competent in understanding child development, family dynamics, the child welfare system, and other relevant information affecting foster youth.
- The bill would increase coordination between mentoring programs and child welfare agencies by supporting the expansion of mentoring services for foster youth.
H.R. 4220, The Chronic Absenteeism in Every School (CARES) Act

- The Chronic Absenteeism Reduction in Every School (CARES) Act is a bipartisan bill that offers evidence-based interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools. It expands funding for school districts to integrate much needed supports in their school buildings.

- Students who are chronically absent—meaning they miss 10 percent or more of the school year—are more likely to fall behind academically, which can lead to hardships later in life. These students are 68 percent less likely than their peers to graduate.

- The presence of a consistent caring adult can be the key to supporting regular attendance, and studies show that students who regularly meet with mentors are 52 percent less likely than their peers to skip a day of school.

- Mentors can help support students often dealing with overlapping issues like challenges within families, transportation, health, fear of bullying, or concern for safety. The bill allows schools to tailor solutions based on why individual or groups of students continue to be absent, so it is not a one size fits all approach.

- The mentors who are paired with students who are chronically absent can either be trained school staff or volunteers from mentoring programs in the community. The mentor will be trained on how to effectively support the student through quality mentoring best practices.

- Mentors can help support students often dealing with overlapping issues like challenges within families, transportation, health, fear of bullying, or concern for safety. The bill allows schools to tailor solutions based on why individual or groups of students continue to be absent, so it is not a one size fits all approach.

- The bill also allows for schools to implement data collection systems and analysis tools that allows educators to track and identify attendance issues and monitor if progress is being made.

- There is planned and ongoing coordination between mentors and school personnel to identify individual student challenges in order to identify issues leading to chronic absenteeism, create comprehensive support plans, and continue to provide a web of support for them.