



December 1, 2022

The Honorable Matthew Cartwright
Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Cartwright and Shaheen and Ranking Members Aderholt and Moran:

We write to thank you again for your long support of and investment in the **Part G Youth Mentoring Program**. This competitive grant housed at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in DOJ supports youth-serving organizations throughout the country as they provide our nation's young people with caring mentors during some of the most challenging times in their lives.

Young people need investment in relationships more than ever. A recent survey found that only 39% of young people said an adult was available to talk to them when feeling stressed or having problems, and previous research has found that 1 in 3 young people in the United States reaches the age of 19 without having a mentor of any kind – known as the “mentoring gap.” Fortunately, there is strong public support for government investment in youth mentoring: a public survey in 2019 found that 83% of Americans express some agreement that government funds should be used for youth mentoring activities. Congress can support efforts to shrink the mentoring gap with continued strategic, increased investment in youth mentoring programs.

As you may recall, the organizations listed below support an investment of at least \$130 million for the OJJDP Youth Mentoring Program grant in FY23. However, we were gratified to see the House-approved funding recommendation of \$110 million, representing an \$8 million increase over FY22. **We strongly encourage Appropriators to fund the OJJDP Youth Mentoring Program at a minimum level of \$110 million in the final CR negotiations.**

Mentoring and relational supports must be a key part of pandemic recovery, school re-engagement for students and ongoing youth mental health efforts. Mentoring programs have stepped up in the past few years to support their communities and help keep families safe and healthy. Strong mentoring services can help address the trauma that youth have faced, including those who lost a caregiver or loved one. Further, it has been well-reported that inflationary costs and workforce shortages have beleaguered the nonprofit sector as a

result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant investment in this program will help more grantees offer competitive positions that appeal to high-quality practitioners to support thousands more young people.

The ability of quality mentoring programs to intersect with any number of issues and support the delivery of specific desired outcomes makes it uniquely valuable for increased public investment.

- **Mentoring and mental health.** Mentors have always been assets to young people when they are experiencing mental health challenges. Youth mentoring programs of all types have the ability to prevent and help youth cope with depressive symptoms. Mentoring services have found particular success in improving mental health symptoms while embedded within and/or in partnership with other institutions and systems, such as schools. It can also be used as a strategy to reduce mental health stigma and increase treatment entry and adherence. With recent studies reporting declines in youth mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has never been more important to ensure mentoring programs and effectively trained mentors are available to support young people.
- **Mentoring and community and youth violence intervention.** Mentoring can be integrated into multi-component violence prevention efforts and offer comprehensive support to youth at risk for committing violence or victimization. It serves as one of the few prevention and intervention strategies that can effectively address multiple risk and protective factors simultaneously. Mentoring has also been found to reduce aggressive behaviors such as fighting, bullying, and delinquency. Mentoring can help young people heal and can assist youth who have engaged or are at-risk of being offenders of violence by providing them with role models who support positive, prosocial behavior. Mentoring programs can partner with agencies, community-based organizations, and private sector entities to implement whole community approaches designed to address violence.
- **Mentoring and education.** Young people facing risk of not completing high school but who had a mentor are more likely to enroll in college, participate in extracurricular activities, hold a leadership position, and volunteer. School-based mentoring programs also have a positive impact on a variety of outcomes, including truancy and absenteeism rates, scholastic efficacy, school-related misconduct, and peer support.
- **Mentoring and opioid and other substance use.** By their senior year of high school, almost 70 percent of students in the U.S. drank alcohol, about half took an illegal drug and more than 20 percent used a prescription drug for a nonprescribed purpose¹. Access to caring adult mentors is a protective factor for young people, lowering the likely incidents of drug use and other harmful behaviors. This is especially true in youth who have a parent, caregiver, or other loved one struggling with or dying as a result of drug misuse.

¹ Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Miech, R. A., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2014). Monitoring the future national results on adolescent drug use: Overview of key findings, 2013. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan.

- **Mentoring and workforce development.** Mentors support youth in career exploration and early employment experiences around providing social-emotional support and hands-on skill development. Building intentional mentoring relationships with young employees has led to higher retention rates, direction in building a career or educational journey, wage increases, and employee satisfaction. It can also help offset feelings of exclusion that prevent marginalized youth from considering certain career paths.

As youth-serving organizations committed to ensuring young people are supported and set up for success, we recognize the unique capabilities of the Youth Mentoring Program grant to improve outcomes for young people facing risk and its capacity to scale effective practices and support. As the only mentoring-specific line item in the federal budget, we urge you to support these efforts by approving an increased appropriation of at least \$110 million for the program in the final FY23 CR.

We appreciate your time. Please contact us should you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance
After-School All-Stars
America's Promise Alliance
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Boys Town
Catholic Charities USA
Center for Supportive Schools
CoGenerate
College Mentors for Kids
Communities in Schools
Cornell Yang Tan Institute on Employment and Disability
Disability EmpowHer Network, Inc.
Eluna
Friends of the Children
Girls Inc.
Goodwill Industries International, Inc.
Healthy Teen Network
iMentor
Institute for Educational Leadership
MENTOR
National 4-H Council
National Crittenton
National Disability Mentoring Coalition
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
National Recreation and Parks Association
National Urban League
YMCA of the USA
YouthBuild USA
Youth Villages

CC: House Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Subcommittee