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**Testimony in Support of Youth Development Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services Programs**  
**Senate Committee on Appropriations**  
**Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

On behalf of MENTOR, our network of Affiliates, and youth mentoring programs across the country, I thank Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Moore Capito for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of critical federal investments for America's young people. I write this on behalf of the thousands of mentoring programs and millions of volunteer adult mentors that serve our communities each day, as well as the millions of young people in the United States still waiting to find the supportive relationships they need to thrive – including an average of 63 per program on wait lists. Specifically, we advocate for federal programs that promote mentoring and positive youth development in the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, including the Full-Service Community Schools program, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program, Student Success and Academic Enrichment Grants, Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants, Title I WIOA Youth Programs, and Project AWARE.

MENTOR is the unifying national champion for expanding quality youth mentoring relationships and connecting volunteers to mentoring opportunities. At a time when 1 in 3 young people are growing up without a mentor – a data point that has grown in recent years among our country's youngest generation – MENTOR seeks to close this “mentoring gap” and ensure that all young people have support they need to succeed, everywhere they are. We seek to leverage resources and provide the tools and expertise that programs require to provide high-quality mentoring for young people who need it most, build greater awareness of the value of mentors, and positively inform public policy in order to bring opportunity to young people in need.

Quality mentoring through structured programs or through relationships that form naturally with teachers, coaches, faith leaders, and other caring adults can have a profound positive impact on educational success, healthy development, and overall wellbeing. It is an innovative, evidence-based practice that is one of few prevention and intervention tactics with the potential to support young people of all demographics and backgrounds in all aspects of their lives. We believe that this critical time in our nation's history requires an approach that considers the inextricable linkage between a young person's academic achievement, mental, social, and physical health. In order for us to meet this moment, federal investment into evidence-based programs that support positive youth development is required.

**The Benefits of Quality Youth Mentoring**

Research confirms that quality evidence-based mentoring has positive effects on young people in a variety of personal, academic, and professional situations:

- Reducing Risky Behaviors: Mentors serve as positive examples to help youth make healthy decisions and avoid high-risk behaviors. Young people who meet regularly with

their mentors are less likely than their peers to use illegal drugs and alcohol. Mentoring can also be integrated into multi-component violence prevention and intervention efforts, reduce aggressive behaviors such as fighting and bullying and provide comprehensive support to youth at risk for committing violence or victimization.

- **Workforce Development:** Mentoring helps develop the talent pipeline for our economy. Mentors prepare young people for the workforce through career exposure, skill-building, and goal-setting. Mentoring can also lead to higher retention rates and wage increases, and is particularly impactful for disadvantaged youth, such as those with disabilities, youth of color, and youth identifying as female, who are often underrepresented in industries such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).
- **Educational Achievement:** Many students find meaningful relationships during the school day. In fact, analyses of one prominent national data set from *Applied Developmental Science* suggest that teachers and other school personnel, such as counselors, coaches, or front office and cafeteria staff, are among the most cited sources of mentors. Further, students who are chronically absent are more likely to drop out of school and have behavioral issues. Mentoring can increase school engagement and improve scholastic efficacy and school-related misconduct.
- **Social Emotional Development and Mental Health:** Mentoring provides young people with a sense of belonging and promote positive social attitudes. In fact, research has shown that the strongest benefit from mentoring is a reduction in depressive symptoms. It can also help reduce mental health stigma and increase treatment entry and adherence. Ultimately, mentoring provides pro-social activities, increased positive relationships, life skills training, and access to networks – helping lead young people to productive futures.

Mentoring programs can effectively and safely provide these benefits when they are fully trained on the most up-to-date mentoring evidence and training. In 2015, through funds from the Youth Mentoring Program, The National Mentoring Resource Center (NMRC) was created to improve the quality and effectiveness of mentoring. MENTOR and its Affiliates provide mentoring tools, program and training materials, and no-cost, evidence-based technical assistance to mentoring programs, school districts, workplaces, and faith-based institutions across the nation through the NMRC. This important resource has bolstered the ability of mentoring programs to serve young people from vulnerable populations, including young people at-risk of entering the juvenile justice system, youth in foster care, and victims of commercial sex trafficking.

### **Closing the Mentoring Gap**

Unfortunately, mentoring organizations across the nation still face barriers in providing high-quality mentoring services. Inflationary costs and workforce shortages have prevented a full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many lack the training that could bolster their programs to better support young people. These issues combined have provided many obstacles for mentoring programs; but with the support of both private and public funds, mentoring organizations can increase capacity to serve every young person in their community. As you consider the FY24 Labor-HHS-Ed appropriations bill, please consider increasing resources to the following federal programs, which allow for the mentoring movement to grow in schools, workplaces, and communities across the country:

- **The Full-Service Community Schools Program** provides school district grantees with comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, students' family

members, and community members in school settings by integrating existing school and community programs and implementing coordinated strategies that can support and positively impact communities experiencing the effects of concentrated poverty. Grantees of this program may provide services including mentoring and other youth development programs. *We call on Congress to fund this program at \$500 million in FY24.*

- **The Nita M. Lowey 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Program** provides states with funding to support before- and after-school and summer learning programs for students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools. Mentoring services are an allowed activity for this funding. *We call on Congress to fund this program at \$2.1 billion in FY24.*
- **Student Success and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV-A of ESSA)** are a flexible program for states and districts to spend on various projects, including those that support “safe and healthy students,” where funding can be used to support mentoring. *We call on Congress to fund this program at \$1.48 billion.*
- **Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants (Title II-A of ESSA)** is a formula grant that is distributed to improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders through preparation, training, recruitment, retention, and professional development. Funding from this program can be used by nonprofit organizations to provide technical assistance to school districts to train on, among other topics, having a “mentoring mindset.” *We call on Congress to fund this program at \$3 billion for FY24.*
- **WIOA Title I Youth Programs** funding can be used to serve eligible youth who face barriers to education, training, and employment, including youth mentoring and workplace mentoring. *We call for maximum funding for this program in FY24.*
- **Project AWARE** provides funding to develop infrastructure for school-based mental health programs and services with the purpose of increasing awareness of mental health issues among school-aged youth, provide training for school professionals to help them identify and respond to mental health issues, and connect school-aged youth with necessary services. *We call for robust funding for this program for FY24.*

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony on this critical federal resource supporting young people. Feel free to reach out with any follow-up questions.