

To: Elementary and Secondary Sub-Committee Chairs: Chairwoman Gayle Slossberg, Chairman Chris Rosario. Appropriations Committee: Chairs Sen. Cathy Osten, Sen. Paul Formica, Rep. Toni Walker, and Ranking Member Melissa Ziobron.

Regardless of the size or demographic of a town, socioeconomic gaps are inevitable. Within my hometown of Hebron, where I have lived my entire life, it would be easy to look around and see a sea of smiling middle-upper class teens and families skating their way through suburban life. Even personally, I often saw my community as prosperous, pleasant, and full of citizens who were content with their lives, all until I became involved as a mentor through our community's Youth and Family services bureau, AHM, nearly three years ago.

As an organization, AHM has given me opportunities to mentor other youth who are struggling. I was fortunate enough to be paired with a bubbly, energetic, and charismatic seventh grade girl when I began to mentor. Although she was less poised and less popular compared to her peers, she seemed comfortable with who she was. This was until she began to be bullied because of her appearance. I began to witness my mentee, who was then transitioning from 8th grade into High School, retract into her own mind. Her smile was often absent from her face and her contagious laugh seldom escaped at all. Contrary to the common misconception of our "unified" community, the ever growing economic gap that had been creating a divide for years within our small town began to reveal itself.

As her mentor, I was to be the problem solver. I was confronted with a growing socio-economic gap that was causing a divide, thriving upon young girls being bullied because of their appearance. As a result, I wanted to create an opportunity that would empower girls of this demographic--an opportunity that would boost self confidence, promote individualism, and encourage personal growth. As a result, I founded a fun event for underprivileged girls; Girls Night Out.

With the help of AHM, Girls Night Out became crucial in bridging a gap within my community by gathering an army of high-school senior girls to volunteer and serve as positive role models for the young girls who were to be entering high school in the coming weeks. Although this event did not solve the massive problem that is bullying, our community took steps to becoming more unified and combatting bullying as a whole. By fostering this event, myself and AHM were able to cultivate the importance of individual strength, self confidence, and

individualism within a demographic of girls that needed it more than ever. Without AHM and their mentoring program, I would not have realized that this population of struggling young girls even existed. AHM has not only worked to help youth and families that are struggling within Hebron, Andover, and Marlborough, but they have taken the extra step to encourage other youth, like myself, to reach out to those in need. By fiscally supporting agencies like AHM, you are supporting the wellbeing of individuals and families who in turn make Connecticut a better place.

Thank you,

Sarah DiPasquale  
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Youth Representative on the AHM Board of Directors