



Madison Youth & Family Services
SUPPORT • COMMUNITY • EMPOWERMENT

Written Testimony for March 6, 2019, 4:00 PM for the Secondary Education Subcommittee

HB7148 An Act Concerning the Budget for the State Department of Education

Dear Senator Abrams, Representative Rosario and members of the Secondary Education Subcommittee.

As I am unfortunately unable to appear in person today for the hearing, I would offer the following written testimony for consideration. When the Governor released his budget proposal the Youth Services Bureau (YSB) main line item went from 2,598,486 to 2,612,772 for both years (includes funding of an additional YSB and is not an actual increase) and the YSB Enhancement line item went from \$620,000 to 588,973 for both years. As the Director for Madison Youth and Family Services (MYFS) and representing the YSB for the Town of Madison, I want to express my opposition for any reductions in our funding. The Town of Madison receives a small portion of this State funding through the State Department of Education in the form of the YSB Main Grant and the Enhancement Grant. These grants have been reduced steadily over the last several years as the State has grappled with its financial woes. During that time, YSBs like mine have been called upon to do more within our communities and have made the most of our funding to stretch our resources to meet the expanding needs of our communities. In addition, the recent changes in state statutes that divert responsibility from juvenile courts to YSBs for juvenile justice cases such as school truancy and “behavior beyond control” have yet to be funded at all.

YSBs are often overlooked and undervalued in terms of their overall impact within their communities, and this is both unfortunate and unwise if the State is concerned for how our communities can support their youth and families growing up in a social world that is evolving in a fast and at times unhealthy manner. Our referrals for mental health services have been steadily increasing in number and complexity. Our community involvement has needed to expand to address increasing rates of depression, anxiety and attempted suicide among our youth. We have needed to prioritize our broader prevention efforts to respond to the youth trends of increased vaping, sexting and risk for substance abuse including opioids.

Our programs are all guided by the same philosophy which is to educate, empower and support youth to help each other. Our programs build on the innate capacities of youth to be a part of a community and care for one another. As a result we see multiple referrals to community services and crisis services that were initiated by a young people, responding on behalf of a peer or family member to get help. This makes a difference every day on the most personal level, and serves as a major protective factor for the community.

Please consider the following. Our modest number of MYFS employees work together to provide a wide variety of crucial programs and services within our community. MYFS provides prevention programming and intervention services to address issues such as youth substance abuse, suicide prevention, youth stress and family/relational violence... just to name a few. We provide prevention programs in both small and large group programs as well classroom presentations. We provide supports and advocacy to at-risk groups including LGBT youth, families with disabilities, racial minorities and families with limited income. We have an outpatient mental health clinic that provides child and family therapy that is accessible and designed to be affordable and even free for those who have limited financial resources or for youth who are seeking help on their own. We provide crisis outreach to youth and families in our Town and have a daily presence in our schools. We are often serving as crisis counselors on the "front lines" of the community crises that directly impact our youth and families. Additionally we run a juvenile review board, provide multiple parent support groups and individual parent counseling. We also provide programmatic and fiduciary support to our Drug and Alcohol coalition known as MADE in Madison. Our staff and programs will reach thousands of Madison residents every year.

Please, I urge you to not cut our funding. Cutting SDE funding for YSBs , especially as other financial aid dwindles to Towns like mine, puts our programs and services in great jeopardy. The financial support is crucial, and continued funding can further demonstrate to every Town that the State is safeguarding its YSBs to the best of its financial ability.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Cochran', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Scott Cochran, LCSW
Director of Madison Youth and Family Services