

FRIENDS OF LIBERTY TESTIMONY

February 2, 2021

Liberty Partnerships Program serves more than 15,000 marginalized students across New York State. Liberty Partnerships Program is New York's only state funded dropout prevention program Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) was established in 1988 under Section 612, Subdivision 6 of the Education Law to address the significant dropout rate among New York's youth. The program and staff provide a safety net for at-risk students. A clear definition of who these students are homeless; in foster care, who struggle with unsatisfactory academic performance with or without learning disabilities; students who display behavior health/ discipline needs. Students who come from communities where family and peers have history of dropping out of school; students who experience negative change in family circumstances for example death of a family member, divorce, and loss of income, natural disasters and community violence. Students with exposure to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse or neglect; history of individual and household substance abuse; Limited English Proficiency; Teenage Pregnancy and parenting; Negative Peer Pressure; Person in Need of Supervision (PINS) and Probation; Social and emotional needs and lastly other adverse childhood experiences for example living in a household with parental and family member incarceration. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) "found a strong graded relationship between the breadth of exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults." (Felitti, 1998). These students are at-risk for lifelong financial, health and social emotional implications when they do not receive support and interventions.

The 46 Liberty Partnerships Programs across New York State provide the required support and interventions. During 2017-18 and 2018-19, program years between 94-96% of Grade 12 enrollees in the Liberty Partnerships Program graduated from high school. LPP prepares students for post-secondary education and careers via comprehensive pre collegiate/dropout prevention programming and services throughout New York State. Almost all of our Middle and High School participants have positive year-end outcomes. Less than 2% of all LPP Participants dropped out of school during 2017-18 and 2018-19 program years.

Hallmarks of LPP programming and services include career preparation, college advising system which works to place students in NYS Collegiate Opportunity Programs; social emotional learning, student advisement, tutoring, and statewide summer melt reduction efforts that have improved our placement rates by over 15%.

Liberty Partnerships Program Students need your assistance

- We are appreciative and grateful for the contract extensions we received for the program year 2019-2020. This extension saved Programs from closing, and limited furloughs, reductions in staff, and reduction in staff. This extension provided the safety net for at-risk students during the pandemic. Receiving funding, which was to begin September 1, 2020 in January impacts continuity, and limits our ability to plan and spend.

We are asking for an additional extension for Program Year 2020-2021, to continue support and intervention without interruption.

- Family and community engagement/support services, and College preparation activities, including virtual college visits, which affect LPP mission related goals. Rural and Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students are deeply impacted by COVID-19 and the digital divide, which still exists throughout NYS School Districts which received less funding have reached out to LPP to do more for their students. LPP has not received a raise in per student since inception in 1989.

We are asking for a 30% increase to the per student formula, which is \$12.50 per year. LPP appreciates the previous increases, which based on how many more students we could serve, however with the increase to minimum wage, and the requirement of Licensed Social Workers and Teachers to meet the increasing need of the students.

The statistics we included are provided by NYSED, due to staff turnover and hiring freeze they are currently without a staff member to specifically focus on the importance of data management. We are asking for the hiring freeze to be lifted in the position of Data Management for Liberty Partnership as all 46 programs are without Data and Information Technology support.

- Our States most vulnerable rely on the services and programming that LPP provides to assist them in staying engaged in school and the learning process. LPP staff have not interrupted our services to this community; we also switched rapidly to remotely providing services and in-person where applicable, handing out school supplies, and assisting our partners in food insecurity for the students' communities. We are eager to return to the school settings when safe to continue our work with these most vulnerable students.

We are asking explicit Essential Worker Classification to be able to receive the vaccine with our colleagues: teachers, paraprofessionals, school administrators in the NYS priority group 1b. The majority of LPP staff do not work for the school districts or college campus, so we are not included in the language to receive the vaccine.

Thank you,
Shawn Landry, LMSW
Friends of Liberty President