

Testimony in Support of Continued Funding for the Liberty Partnerships Program

To the Honorable Members of the NYS Standing Committee on Ways and Means and NYS Senate Finance Committee:

As President of the Friends of the NYS Liberty Partnerships, Inc., I am honored to have the opportunity to write to you today in support of the continued success of the Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP), New York State's sole state-funded dropout prevention program. Established in 1988, LPP has a proud history of serving diverse student populations across our state for over 35 years. LPP eligibility is determined by a holistic assessment of individual student needs, focusing on factors such as academic challenges, attendance issues, social-emotional difficulties, family transitions, and other circumstances that may impact a student's success.

LPP is more than just a program; it is an investment in the future of our young people. Recognizing the unique challenges facing many of our youth, LPP was designed to provide a comprehensive support system that goes beyond academics. Each of the 51 LPP projects utilizes student self-reports, assessments, and data to create personalized learning plans (PLP), ensuring that every student receives the attention and support they need to succeed. Our goal is not just to see students graduate, but to empower them with the skills, knowledge, and support to achieve their postsecondary and career aspirations. LPP fosters a sense of hope and possibility, equipping young people with the confidence and resilience to navigate the complexities of the 21st century.

A key focus of LPP is to ensure that students not only graduate but also successfully transition to college and/or the workforce. LPP empowers students by fostering a supportive learning environment, addressing attendance and academic challenges, providing mental health services to address underlying issues, and comprehensive college and career counseling. LPP also proactively addresses the critical issue of "summer melt," a phenomenon where students lose momentum between high school graduation and their first year of college. LPP's dedicated staff work tirelessly to ensure students remain on track, providing ongoing support and addressing any potential barriers to their success.

LPP has demonstrated remarkable success in supporting our most vulnerable students. Thanks to an increase in funding and the removal of the per-pupil funding cap in recent years, we have been able to expand our reach, adding five new projects and serving over 1,000 additional students. During the 2023-24 program year, LPP served over 18,000 students across the state. This success is reflected in our strong outcomes: a 96% student retention rate and an 86% graduation rate in 2023-24, which is on par with the statewide average. Importantly, LPP has a consistent track record of meeting, and at times, exceeding state averages in graduation rates, while maintaining an exceptionally low dropout rate of less than 1% (compared to the state rate of 5%). This expansion has been crucial in addressing the critical needs of diverse student populations, including rural white students, English Language Learners (ELL), homeless students, and students with disabilities.

To further enhance the impact of LPP and ensure its continued success, we respectfully request a restoration of the Governor's funding cut and advocate for an augmentation in funding considering the long-term economic and societal impact this may have for our youth. We are respectfully asking for the Committee to consider a 20% increase in funding, from \$25.4 million

to \$30.4 million. This increased funding will enable LPP to expand essential services, including mental health services, mentoring, summer programs, family engagement opportunities, alumni affinity support, and access to NYS Opportunity Programs. Furthermore, this funding will support efforts to promote student participation and LPP staff retention while implementing programming focused on developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for students to overcome barriers to their academic success. This will bring program funding closer to the levels originally envisioned for supporting at-risk students through the Liberty Partnerships Program

Elizabeth Altman

President, Friends of the NYS Liberty Partnerships, Inc.