



Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships, Inc. Testimony
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Higher Education
February 27, 2023

My name is Elizabeth Altman, and I am pleased to provide my testimony to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing of the New York State Legislature. I am writing in my capacity as the president of the Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships, Inc. in support of the 2023-24 Regents Budget and Legislative Initiatives. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and commend Chair Krueger and Chair Weinstein in their decision to host this hearing.

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. Liberty is celebrating its 35th anniversary as New York's only state-funded dropout prevention program. Liberty is a collaboration of 51 institutions of higher education across the State that support at-risk middle school and high school students in their academic and social-emotional development.

LPP serves more than 15,000 marginalized students across New York State. The students that Liberty serves are economically disadvantaged, homeless, foster care, or on probation; students who display behavioral and mental health needs. They are struggling with unsatisfactory academic performance, with or without learning disabilities. Students who experience negative peer pressure, inconsistent school attendance, and come from communities where family and peers have a history of dropping out of school. As well as negative changes in family circumstances for example death of a family member, divorce, loss of income, natural disasters and community violence. Limited English Proficiency students that are often stigmatized and who experience discrimination. Students that are exposed to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse or neglect. They have a history of individual and household substance abuse or teenage pregnancy with social and emotional needs that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as a pandemic, violence, death, can lead to mental illness, substance abuse, and chronic health problems as adults [1]. Therefore, these students are at a greater risk



for lifelong health issues, adverse social-emotional well-being, food insecurities, and living in under-resourced communities when they do not receive necessary support and interventions. According to recent research, the disruptions to school and home life during the pandemic are impacting our student's immediate well-being [2]. Liberty provides these necessary student interventions through its partnerships with local education agencies. It is through these partnerships, Liberty is positioned uniquely to provide mental health services to students directly at the K-12 level to our fifth through twelfth grade students.

The 51 Liberty Partnerships Programs across New York State provide necessary and preventative interventions for our at-risk youth. During the 2021-2022 program year 91% of the 12th grade students in the Liberty Partnerships Program graduated from high school. LPP supports their student's well-being by providing services that help to foster a strong sense of community for students and their families. LPP provides students with a space that supports their social and emotional growth while in an academic setting. Staff provide meaningful and engaging programs that prepares students for a 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 1% of all LPP students dropped out of school during the 2021-2022 academic year.

Hallmarks of LPP programming and services include personalized learning plans, social-emotional assessments, experiential learning, and social emotional learning. Liberty students are provided with programming that encourages leadership, community engagement, and stewardship opportunities. They are provided career preparation, a college advising system which works to place students in NYS Collegiate Opportunity Programs, mentoring, student advisement, academic remediation, and statewide summer melt reduction efforts that have improved our placement rates each year. Help us to continue to provide services to the State's most vulnerable youth that rely on the comprehensive services and programming that LPP provides to assist them to thrive.



Liberty Partnerships Program Students Need Your Assistance

- We are asking for a 20% increase to program funding. LPP is most thankful for your previous support. Although, in consideration the rise of inflation costs, and the increase of the mental health needs for the students we serve, we believe 20% is necessary.
- We are also asking for the removal of the per pupil cap, as proposed by the Board of Regents and supported by the Governor, to enhance program services to the students without limitations.
- We are also hopeful to bring awareness to the fact that Liberty programs statewide have experienced late funding over the past several years. Which impacts continuity with our students, and limits our ability to plan and spend. Funding is needed for services to start as of September 1st. Often, the funding is not received until the second fiscal quarter and more recently in the second half of the program fiscal year.

References

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, April 6). *Help youth at risk for ACEs*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/help-youth-at-risk.html>

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, March 31). *Disruptions to school and home life among high school students during the COVID-19 pandemic - adolescent behaviors and experiences survey, United States, January–June 2021*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/su/su7103a5.htm>

Thank you,
Elizabeth Altman, President
Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships, Inc.