

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

****October 9th, 2024****

****119K Commission Releases Groundbreaking Plan to Address the Disconnected Youth Crisis in Connecticut****

****Hartford, CT**** – The 119K Commission proudly announces the release of its comprehensive plan to tackle the growing crisis of disconnected youth in Connecticut. This pivotal plan, titled *Young People First: A Bold Plan to Address Connecticut's Statewide Crisis*, represents a significant milestone in ongoing efforts to address and remedy the challenges faced by young people who are disconnected from education and employment.

Back in October 2023, the release of Dalio Education's *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* report marked a pivotal moment for Connecticut, shedding light on the severe issue of youth disconnection across the state. This report highlighted an acute problem that results in a significant lost opportunity for Connecticut's future. The statistics are stark and compelling:

1. 119,000 young people in Connecticut are either at-risk or disconnected from education and the workforce, accounting for nearly 20% of the youth population aged 14 to 26. 40,000 of these young adults have high school diplomas but cannot secure and maintain meaningful employment, even though there are over 90,000 job openings in Connecticut.
2. 13% of Connecticut's children live in poverty, with significant geographical and racial disparities. 37% of children under the age of 18 in Hartford County live below the poverty line. Even in Fairfield County, the county with the lowest child poverty rate at 12%, 25% of Hispanic children and 19% of Black children live below the poverty line.
3. Nearly 5,500 Connecticut students were impacted by homelessness in 2023-24, the highest rate in a decade.
4. 70% of CT's high school students report that their mental health is "not good." One-third of students felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more, but only 25% of those who felt that way sought help.
5. A study conducted in New Haven found that nearly 50% of students in selected grades scored within the clinical range for PTSD, indicating a high prevalence of trauma-related symptoms among youth.

This crisis impacts every town across Connecticut, from urban centers to rural communities, underscoring the widespread nature of the problem and the imperative for leaders across the state to work together to address this challenge.

In response to this statewide crisis, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities organized and launched the 119K Commission in March 2024, after hosting multiple listening tours and local forums across Connecticut over the Fall of 2023. The Commission, guided by a singular goal to reduce the statewide crisis by half within 10 years, led an open and inclusive strategy development process that spanned eight months and covered every corner of Connecticut.

The Commission held six regional public meetings in New Haven, Mansfield, Trumbull, Meriden, Hartford, and New London, focusing on issues like poverty, housing insecurity, and inadequate education. The Commission heard from young people, superintendents, police chiefs, non-profit leaders, state agency leaders, youth development workers, residents, and many others. These meetings provided invaluable insights and allowed the Commission to gather diverse perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by Connecticut's young people. Thousands have engaged with these meetings through live streams and recordings on Facebook.

The Commission went directly to more than 225 young people in their communities, listening to their ideas and learning from their experiences. The Commission organized eight roundtable discussions with a diverse set of young people who are at-risk, moderately disconnected, or severely disconnected, including incarcerated individuals. Young people shared concerns about feeling bored in school, unsafe in their communities and schools, and struggling to find necessary resources. They emphasized the importance of having trusting relationships with adults they admire. This firsthand input from those most affected by disconnection was crucial in shaping our strategies and ensuring they are relevant and impactful.

The Commission also collected over 55 pieces of testimony through its website, 119kcommission.org, providing an accessible platform for individuals to share their experiences and suggestions. Common themes include the need for better communication among agencies, streamlined services, and more equitable funding for education. Five local forums hosted by commissioners further deepened the Commission's understanding of regional issues and opportunities.

The plan highlights the pressing need for targeted interventions and collaborative efforts to ensure that these young individuals have access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

Strategic Pillars of the plan include:

1. **Coordination** - Coordinated support for youth at all levels. Implementing new educational pathways and alternative learning models to better accommodate the diverse needs of disconnected youth.
2. **Conditions** - Creation of stronger conditions for youth success within and beyond schools. Developing robust vocational and career training programs in collaboration with local businesses and educational institutions.
3. **Coalitions** - Build and sustain coalitions. Building stronger support networks through partnerships between schools, non-profits, and local governments.
4. **Capacity** - Increased capacity in education, workforce, and the social sector. Allocating additional resources to programs specifically designed to address the needs of disconnected youth.

Elinor Carbone, Mayor of Torrington and Co-Chair of the 119K Commission, expressed support for the report, stating, "This report provides a critical roadmap for addressing one of the most urgent issues facing our state. We must act decisively to ensure every young person has the opportunity to thrive. I am committed to working with CCM and our partners to implement these recommendations."

Stay tuned for more public forums hosted by various stakeholders in partnership with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities in the coming weeks to discuss the findings and begin to build momentum around action. The goal is to foster a collaborative approach to implementing the recommendations and driving meaningful change.

For a copy of the plan or to participate in upcoming events, please visit the 119K Commission's website 119kcommission.org or contact:

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