

**Student Testimony to State Appropriations Committee**  
**March 6, 2019**

Hello Senator Abrams, Representative Rosario, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am a senior at Middletown High School and I have had the pleasure of working with Justin Carbonella and the Middletown Youth Services Bureau since my freshman year, which seems like both a long time and much too short all at the same time. The work that Youth Services Bureaus do are absolutely necessary for our communities. They serve to change young people's lives when it matters most, both proactively and reactively.

Through programs such as the Mayoral Youth Cabinet, young people are empowered to use their minds, voices, and energies to better their communities. With the right supports, young people's efforts can be transformative and drive innovation and positive change in their communities. I have worked on issues of racial equity, building relationships within the community, connecting young people with the resources they need, improving police relationships with young people and communities of color, among many others. All of these projects make Middletown a better place to live for everyone in our community.

Through diversion work and restorative practices, young people are supported holistically. Instead of being immediately assigned punitive punishments that have often been shown to result in recidivism, such as detention, or jail time, we look for root causes and needs that are not being met for that young person. Why does the young person feel the need to shoplift? Do they have the resources they need? This relatively simple change in approach and mindset has quite literally changed the course of people's lives. Connecting young people to the resources they need and believing in them can transform those who may have grown up committing crimes and internalizing they were bad people into positive members of society and those who want to give back to their communities. We have seen it time and time again.

Middletown's Youth Services Bureau and people like Justin Carbonella have transformed my life and given me more than I can really put into words -- a sense that my ideas and work are meaningful, that I am capable of being impactful. The experience has helped me to realize that I want to dedicate my life to social justice and to study public policy and advocacy in the fall when I go off to college.

Investing in Youth Services Bureaus is an investment in our young people, our communities, and the future of our nation. YSBs have the power to change the course of young people's lives, who will, in turn, go on to change our communities and our world.