

**From:** Celeste Janssen  
**To:** [JWMED Exhibits](#)  
**Cc:** [BROOKS Brenda - YDD](#); [BELL Iris - YDD](#)  
**Subject:** testimony on behalf of the Youth Development Council  
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Hello,

My name is Celeste Janssen, and I'm the chair of the Youth Development Council.

Every week, I take a heartbreaking phone call. Sometimes it is from a DHS caseworker, or a counselor at a school. But usually, the call comes from a single mom. The story is almost always the same – she has a son (a 10, 11, or 12 year old) and the mom is panicking. Things are changing. Teachers are talking to her. She sees her son making choices, and she wants to do something now, while he is still young. She knows she needs help; a male role model; someone for him to talk to.

These moms, and caseworkers and counselors, always call looking for a mentor. They call my organization, because for the last 15 years, we had a hotline to help people locate a mentoring program. But the news today is sad: there are very little (basically no) mentoring programs that are enrolling students. Most programs are at capacity, and have wait lists of years.

We try to find any service that will help the mom get additional adults in her son's life: sports, leadership, STEM. But for many families, these services are few and far between. There is simply not enough slots.

Youth programs have suffered a massive dis-investment from the state over the past twenty years. There are major, real, and painful consequences to families for this dis-investment.

Brain researchers have found that while the brain is massively growing and changing in early childhood, the middle school years is a second time of major changes. During those years, youth are changing from identifying from their families to beginning to identify as an individual. Youth are making decisions that may define them throughout their entire life. Investment in programs that serve youth in middle and high school set up youth to be tax-paying, responsible, civic adults.

One study, from Australia, looked at the cost of running a mentoring program for high risk youth, and compared that to the cost of incarceration. If the mentoring program was incredibly ineffective, and averted just 1.3% of participants from high-risk behaviors, the entire cost of the mentoring program would be justified, and the state would break even.

I strongly support the Youth Development Council, and the grants the YDC makes.

Celeste

Celeste Janssen  
Education Northwest  
Director, Institute for Youth Success  
101 SW Main St., Suite 500; Portland, OR 97204  
503.275.9580 or 800.547.6339  
[Celeste.Janssen@educationnorthwest.org](mailto:Celeste.Janssen@educationnorthwest.org)  
<http://educationnorthwest.org>

