

**Testimony of**  
**Tammy Papa, Director**  
**City of Bridgeport ~ Lighthouse Program**  
**to the**  
**Sub Committee on Children and Families**  
**for the**  
**Roundtable hearing, entitled**  
**“The State of the American Child: What’s Working for Connecticut’s Children”**  
**July 26, 2010**

Good morning. My name is Tammy Papa and I am the Director of the City of Bridgeport Lighthouse Before, After School and Summer Program. On behalf of our partner agencies and the children and families we serve, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on what is working for Connecticut’s Children. A very special thank you to you Senator Dodd for all you have done in support of our program over the years. Without your leadership along with Senator Lieberman, former Congressman Christopher Shays, and Congressman Himes, we would not have been in a position to serve over 2,700 children per day for the past 17 years.

**History:** Partnership that began in 1993 between the City of Bridgeport, Board of Education, and numerous faith and community based organizations, as well as institutions of higher education at a time when our young people were being shot and killed on our streets in broad daylight, after school, and within yards or our public schools. Then Mayor Joseph Ganim along with former Superintendent James Connelly called upon some of the larger non profits and faith based organizations within the city to work together on a solution to curb the violence. The City was coming out of bankruptcy and was only able to contribute a small amount. Other agencies did what they could as well. With approximately \$100,000 in seed money, three schools in critical neighborhoods and a few community centers extended their hours. With the start of the new fiscal year in July, 1993, an influx of Education Cost Share funding allowed the City through the Board of Education to expand programming into 17 summer and after school sites. The program was scaled back to 11 sites the following year maintaining a budget of approximately \$850,000 where it remained until receiving its first 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant in 1998 and an increase of \$400,000 from the City. Former Mayor John Fabrizi and current Mayor Bill Finch have both maintained the City’s investment in after school which today totals \$1,350,000 annually. From 11 after school sites the program has grown to 24 sites and the need to open two additional schools in the fall and spring of 2010 and 2011 respectively is evident. The program receives federal, state, local, private foundation, and parent fees. It’s 2010-2011 budget totals \$4,000,000 dollars.

**Currently Serving:** 2,700 Bridgeport children daily in grades K-8 during the school year from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. and during the summer for five weeks from 9:00 – 5:00 p.m. employing over 300 individuals.

**Percent of Public School Student Population Served:** Approximately 12% for the 2009-2010 school year.

In addition to providing a **safe** place for children who might otherwise go home to an unsupervised setting, the Lighthouse Program also addresses the following issues:

**Achievement Gap** – Through tutoring, partnerships with local universities, regular contact with daytime teachers, state of the art curriculum in reading and math as well as activities that focus on critical thinking skills, the Lighthouse Program is making strides to close the achievement gap. Our latest independent evaluation conducted by Dr. Phil Zarlengo, former Director of the Lab at Brown University reports that *“2009 findings for Lighthouse participants are significant for Reading, Writing, and Math when compared to the rest of the district. Students in all but 5<sup>th</sup> grade are performing at proficiency or above in reading and math. The average CMT Mathematics score of Lighthouse students exceeded the district score in grades 3-8 and the average Reading and Writing score of Lighthouse students exceeded the district score in grades 3,5,7, and 8.”* This evidence is further backed by the research conducted over a two year period by Deborah Lowe Vandell, University of California, Irvine and her team titled *“The Study of Promising Practices,”* which Bridgeport’s Lighthouse Program was part of. She found that *“those elementary school students who regularly attended the high-quality afterschool programs demonstrated significant gains.”* We are hopeful that subsequent evaluations will show further growth and anticipate the completion of the 2010 report shortly. In the meantime, we continue to research new, innovative, and cost effective approaches that engage children in activities that promote learning.

- **Physical, Social and Emotional Well Being** – By offering children activities in a judgment free zone in which pressure to perform is taken out of the equation, they adapt and rise to the occasion. Through partnerships with the Kennedy Center, the Lighthouse Program is working with some of the districts most challenged students during after school hours and daytime teachers are reporting positive changes in behavior. Activities that encourage team approaches like those offered through First Tee, USTA’s Quick Start, and Cal Ripken’s Healthy Choices, Healthy Students among a host of other activities like ballroom dancing, chess, organized basketball clinics, drama, etc. indicate Lighthouse children’s physical, social, and emotional needs are being met. Daytime teachers reported that *“72% of students had good to excellent relationships with peers and 83% had good to excellent relationships with teachers.”* Furthermore, *“86% of Lighthouse participants are rarely or never referred to the office for disciplinary reasons and 79% rarely or never require in class discipline”* resulting in fewer disruptions and more time on task. Through these varied activities, the

Lighthouse Program is also addressing the serious obesity rate among our young people. Joseph Mahoney PhD, Associate Professor of Psychology at Yale University during the time of his research on the Lighthouse Program, noted that *“Childhood obesity is a significant problem in this nation and in the city of Bridgeport. The condition is known to predict a range of serious health problems. When the children in this study were only 5-years-old, nearly one-quarter of them were clinically obese. However, over time, children participating in after-school programs showed a less marked increase in their body mass index and lower rates of clinical obesity. In particular, by the second year of the study, 33% of children who did not participate in after-school programs were obese compared to only 21% of those who did participate in after-school programs.”* By providing Lighthouse children with healthy snacks, rotating them from activity to activity, and encouraging a minimum of 20 minutes of exercise per day, the program is making strides to curb this most serious epidemic. Dr. Mahoney’s study further concluded that *“children in Bridgeport’s after school program had higher expectations of success and more socially acceptable behavior when compared to children in self care, parent care or relative care.”* This is especially critical because all the research shows that student expectations of his or her performance have a direct correlation to his or her rates of success.

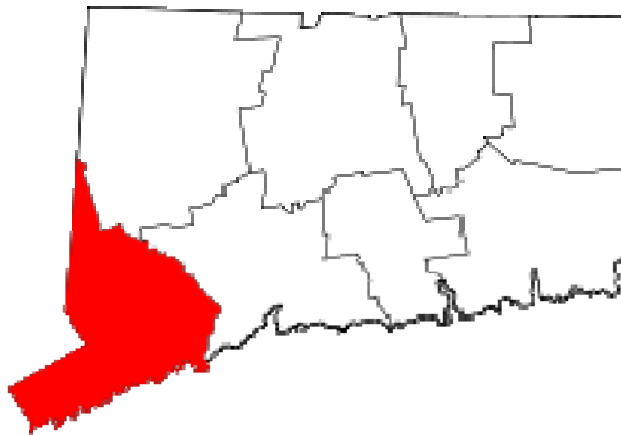
- **Community Violence** - Research shows that exposure to criminal activity over time can hinder one’s ability to focus in school and most often times creates problem behavior. With the rise of gang activity on our streets it is critical that we keep our children in supervised settings and away from danger until a parent or guardian can be there. We use this time productively to help build relationships between local law enforcement and students. Raising awareness about the negative impact of joining gangs and what to look for in their community is reducing their risk of becoming involved in illicit activities or being victimized. In his study of Lighthouse Program participants over four years, Dr. Mahoney concluded *“for those children exposed to high rates of crime and violence in their neighborhoods, participation in the after school program appeared to buffer them from exposure and significantly reduce the likelihood of developing academic and behavior problems at school.”*

Since the Lighthouse Program is not exempt from the current recession, it has become even more critical that we constantly measure our success and look for new ways to engage not only our K-8 population, but also our high school youth who suffer greatly from a lack of employment opportunities. There can be no time, effort, or money wasted on unsuccessful activities as needs grow during tough economic times and tend to have a devastating effect on the young and elderly alike. Therefore, in addition to our annual independent evaluation which collects both quantitative and qualitative information, we are conducting additional site visits, asking site coordinators to conduct periodic self assessments, keeping in regular contact with principals, and asking for

community feedback. In this manner, we are poised to attract additional funding opportunities that will enable us to bring current programs to scale and replicate services throughout the district.

### ***The Impact of After School on Bridgeport and the Region***

- Economic Development
  - Employs over 300 certified teachers, para-professionals, college students, youth, and adults
  - Allows approximately 1,800 families to work full days
  - Higher employee productivity levels
  - Incentive for company relocations
- Higher Test Scores
  - Reading, Writing, and Math
- Lower Crime Rates and Less Exposure to Crime
- Transition from Early Childhood Initiatives
- Lower Obesity Rates
  - Reduced health care costs
  - Improved Self Esteem
- Less Discipline Referrals
- Higher Attendance Rates



Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.