



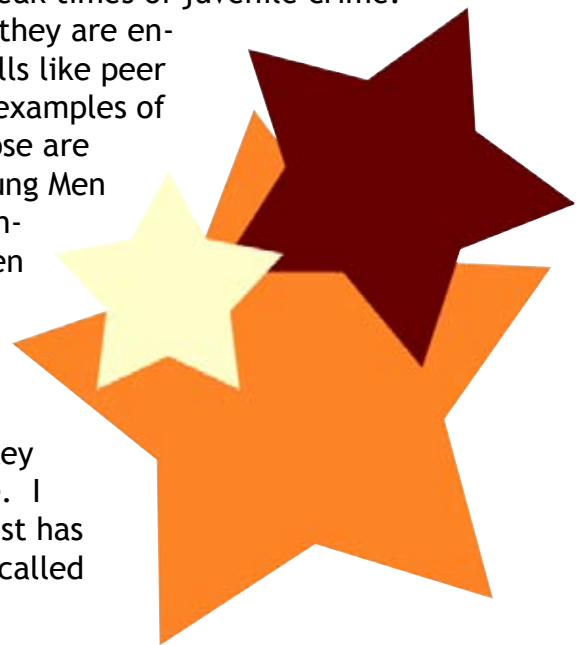
## TESTIMONY

Testimony of Curtis Watkins, Founder and Executive Director, LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services Board Member, DC Alliance of Youth Advocates

Good afternoon, Council members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Curtis Watkins. I am speaking today as the Founder and Executive Director of LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services, which was known as the East Capitol Center for Change until last September when we formally changed our name. I am also speaking to you today as a board member of the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates, a coalition of youth-engaged organizations, youth, and concerned residents formed to ensure that all District of Columbia youth have access to high-quality and affordable developmental opportunities.

My purpose in testifying today is to let you know that the funds you provide to the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation have a tremendous impact on young people across the District. First, CYITC-funded programs reduce negative activity like juvenile delinquency. The hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. represent the red zone of juvenile homicides nationally. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of juvenile murders take place during these hours on school days. The remainder takes place on the weekends. In addition, data tells us that juvenile violence spikes during the summer months.

By providing quality out-of-school-time programs Monday thru Saturday and during the summer months, youth are engaged in meaningful activities during the peak times of juvenile crime. Students are less likely to participate in juvenile crime because they are engaged in programming that helps them to develop leadership skills like peer mediation, which helps them to make positive decisions. Good examples of just a few of the CYITC-funded programs that achieve this purpose are G.A.M.E., Girls Acquiring Meaningful Experiences, and YMC3, Young Men of Color Cross Cities Collaborative. G.A.M.E. is an initiative to increase the number of programs focused on girls and young women in the District. YMC3 was created to give CBO's the opportunity to share learning and best practices and programming for young men of color as well as to engage city leaders in the policies that will expand access and equity for this population. Second, the Trust's programs don't just reduce the negatives, they boost positives like good educational outcomes for young people. I have first-hand evidence for this. For several years now, the Trust has provided funds to LifeSTARTS and other providers for a program called



Literacy Loop, which is a cross-age, academic after-school tutoring program that focuses on boosting the reading skills of both tutors and tutees. Thanks to Literacy Loop funding, my agency hires 15 H. D. Woodson High students to tutor about 30 younger children at neighboring Drew Elementary School. The program is in session in Ward 7 at this very moment.

Our data show that the high school students who participate in Literacy Loop improve their reading by an average of 1.5 grade levels in just six months. These gains are even more dramatic for students who start the program behind by 4 - 8 grade levels. One 10th grade young man began the program reading at the third grade level in the Fall and was reading at the 6th grade level by Spring. Drew teachers rave about seeing vast improvements in the grade-school tutees as well. Very shortly, you will hear more from one of our Literacy Loop students, Woodson senior Raymond Barnett.

CYITC does an excellent job of funding and overseeing innovative, high-impact programs like G.A.M.E. and Literacy Loop. In FY 07 CYITC was able to help CBO's engage over 19,000 youth in meaningful activities in a variety of settings all across the city. CYITC should not experience a decrease in funds when its programs and initiatives have a positive effect on so many youth in the District.