

November 9, 2020

To the members of the Board of Supervisors:

I am writing with regard to the potential budget cuts that could drastically affect the Youth Bureau. I was pleased to hear that they were no longer being completely eliminated, but I am still concerned with the impact that cuts could have on the work that they do.

As member of the community and someone who has worked in the county for more than 15 years in collaboration with the Schoharie County Youth Bureau, I can attest to the work they have done to benefit the youth in our county. In my current position, I work across six counties and routinely brainstorm with my colleagues on ways to positively occupy our youth during school breaks and summer recess. When I tell them what is available to us through the Youth Bureau in Schoharie County, they are always impressed and surprised to hear how much our rural county does for our children.

I have worked directly with the Youth Bureau through the Schoharie Elementary Helping Club where they provided educational, fun group activities to youth in need of that support in interaction. Not only did those projects benefit the children in the Helping Club, but their projects with local food pantries and animal shelters also benefitted the larger community. Another collaboration was an Independent Living Course for teens, where the Youth Bureau developed a team trust-building experience for the teens who were anxious about being around a new peers and adults and helped to support an emotionally safe environment.

Currently, I work with youth in the county who have chronic health conditions and/or serious emotional disturbances. Each year, the children I serve participate in Youth Bureau programming, which has become one of the only remaining institutions in our community where they can be a part of socially positive, exciting activities that are little to no cost to them. The youth I work with appreciate the many experiences the Youth Bureau provides to them, such as whitewater rafting and geo-caching, for which they have neither the financial resources nor the ability to travel outside their immediate community.

The Youth Bureau serves children in the community from all incomes, needs, and ability levels. Children across school districts have made positive connections with each other at these events. Although the numerous, positive adulations regarding the direct work with youth I have experienced are too many to count, it is self-evident in the fact that every summer the Youth Bureau has waitlists and early sign-up for their extremely popular programs. In the Youth as Leaders program, my youth gain self-confidence as well as a wonderful addition their resume or their college applications.

Clearly the employees of the Schoharie County Youth Bureau have dedicated their time, as indicated in the mission statement, "...to providing youth in Schoharie County a connection to our natural world through outdoor adventure and a place for youth to grow, learn and have fun by experiencing the challenges and opportunities encountered in an outdoor environment."

Outside of the actual youth programming, I have also collaborated with the Youth Bureau through the Safe Harbor Act, a federally funded grant for which they have been the lead for several years. They formed the committee and collaborated with agencies and other Safe Harbor programs across counties to ensure the terms of the grant were successfully met and provided the programming tied to the education related to the grant.

When you cast your vote on the budget, I urge you to please consider the direct impact it will have on a very important, successful department in the county and, especially, on our county's youth.

Sincerely,

Melanie J. LaVigne  
Care Manager Supervisor  
Parsons Child & Family Center