

Testimony of Favor Ellis

Executive Director, Elevate Youth Services

In Support of Funding the Barre Outreach & Drop-In Teen Center

Public Safety & Opioid Settlement Alignment

Preliminary Plan: Co-Location at the Aldrich Public Library

Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Favor Ellis, and I am the Executive Director of Elevate Youth Services. Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of funding the Barre Outreach and Drop-In Teen Center.

This project is designed as a **public safety and prevention strategy**, aligned with Vermont's opioid settlement priorities, and grounded in a practical, cost-conscious plan to co-locate services within an existing community institution: the Aldrich Public Library.

Elevate Youth Services has served Central Vermont youth for nearly 50 years. We work with young people ages 12–24 who are navigating housing instability, family conflict, substance use, mental health challenges, and social disconnection. Across decades of work, one pattern is consistent: **crises escalate when there is nowhere safe for young people to go and no trusted adult paying attention early.**

Barre currently lacks a dedicated, low-barrier, youth-specific space during the hours when risk is highest—after school, evenings, weekends, and school breaks. In the absence of such a space, young people are more likely to experience unsupervised time in unsafe environments, increased substance use, and contact with emergency or law enforcement systems.

The Barre Outreach and Drop-In Teen Center is intended to interrupt that pathway early.

Public Safety & Opioid Settlement Alignment

From a public safety perspective, this project provides a **preventive alternative** to system involvement by:

- Offering a safe, supervised space that reduces youth presence in high-risk settings
- Identifying concerns early before situations escalate into emergency responses
- Reducing youth homelessness and instability, which are strongly linked to public safety impacts

From an opioid settlement perspective, the center advances core goals of **prevention, early intervention, and recovery support** by:

- Connecting youth to trained staff who can recognize early substance use and mental health concerns
- Providing harm reduction education and trusted pathways to counseling and treatment
- Reducing isolation, one of the strongest predictors of substance misuse
- Strengthening protective factors like stable relationships, routine, and positive peer connection

These are upstream investments that reduce long-term costs to healthcare, emergency response, and corrections systems.

Preliminary Plan: Co-Location at the Aldrich Public Library

Elevate Youth Services is in early, exploratory conversations about housing the Barre Outreach and Drop-In Teen Center at the Aldrich Public Library. While this plan is still preliminary, it offers a strong foundation for both feasibility and impact.

Under this model:

- The center would operate during **after-school and evening hours**, complementing library operations rather than displacing existing services.
- Programming would focus on **drop-in support, outreach, prevention, and connection**, not overnight shelter.
- Elevate Youth Services staff would be present to provide supervision, relationship-based support, and referrals.
- The library would remain a public, community-oriented space, while gaining additional capacity to support youth who are already using the building.

This co-location approach:

- Minimizes start-up and capital costs by leveraging existing space
- Reduces stigma by embedding youth support in a trusted, accessible public institution
- Increases safety for youth, library staff, and the broader community
- Allows for faster implementation than a standalone facility

Importantly, this model builds on successful partnerships between libraries and youth service organizations across the country, where libraries function as community hubs and points of early intervention.

Closing

The Barre Outreach and Drop-In Teen Center is not a shelter or a treatment facility. It is a **front-end public safety and prevention strategy**—one that meets young people early, reduces harm, and strengthens community stability.

Funding this project represents a responsible, cost-effective use of public and opioid settlement dollars. It addresses risk before crisis, supports Barre's young people, and reduces downstream strain on emergency, healthcare, and justice systems.

On behalf of the youth and families we serve, I urge you to support this funding. Thank you for your time and your commitment to public safety, prevention, and community wellbeing.