

CREDIBLE MESSENGERS:



American Youth
Policy Forum

A Youth Policy Solution

Background

As **young people face challenges** in their lives, they **need someone they can turn to for support**—someone they can relate to, who makes them feel seen, heard, and like they belong—**someone like a credible messenger**.

Credible messengers are mentors whose lived experiences serve as a credential in their work to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to young people facing similar challenges.

Trained, resourced, supported, and well-paid credible messengers are vital to:

- **Building relationships** through personal experiences and connections
- **Assisting with crisis** management and conflict resolution
- **Teaching accountability** through first-hand experience
- **Leading by example**, influencing young people to serve their communities.

Credible Messengers & Federal Policy

MENTORING

Mentors can help young people **reduce health-risk behavior and improve academic outcomes, social-emotional wellbeing, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and sense of identity**.¹ Moreover, mentors with similar lived experiences and identities can help build young people's **ability to cope** with what they're going through, as youth can see themselves in their mentors.²

Relevant legislation:

- Mentoring to Succeed Act of 2021 ([H.R. 4076 / S. 2198](#))
- Foster Youth Mentoring Act of 2021 ([H.R. 3083](#))
- Transition-to-Success Mentoring Act ([H.R. 6481](#))

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

In the midst of the **youth mental health crisis**, credible messengers offer a sense of connectedness that helps **young people feel seen, heard, supported, and understood** in ways that others cannot easily relate. It's also an opportunity for young people to see someone with similar life experiences thriving.

Credible messengers can **supplement the important work of therapists, counselors, and social workers, who do not have the capacity** to serve all the young people in need.

Relevant legislation:

- Mental Health Services for Students Act of 2021 ([H.R. 721 / S. 1841](#))
- Mental Health Matters Act ([H.R. 7780](#))
- Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act of 2021 ([H.R. 4198 / S. 3927](#))
- Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act of 2021 ([H.R. 3549 / S. 2730](#))
- Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act ([H.R. 3572 / S. 1811](#))
- Advancing Student Services in Schools Today Act ([H.R. 7672 / S. 3704](#))



SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

A credible messenger can **walk alongside** the young person as they work through their emotions and circumstances and **help address the root of any behavioral issues**. The credible messenger supports the young person in **taking accountability** for their actions while they **problem-solve** together.

Relevant legislation:

- Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act ([H.R. 4011 / S. 2125](#))
- Ending PUSHOUT Act of 2021 ([H.R. 2248](#))
- Protecting Our Students in Schools Act of 2021 ([H.R. 3836 / S. 2029](#))
- Keeping All Students Safe Act (KASSA) ([H.R. 3474 / S. 1858](#))

WORKFORCE

Many young people are struggling to find meaningful, stable employment, especially those who have been through the **legal or child welfare systems, are youth of color, have experienced homelessness, have a disability, or come from a neighborhood with limited resources**. Credible messenger programs can meet that need.

Relevant legislation:

- Youth Workforce Readiness Act of 2021 ([H.R. 3342 / S. 1696](#))
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022 ([H.R. 7309](#))



Model Credible Messenger Programs:

- iFoster's Transition-Age Youth (TAY) AmeriCorps Program
- Ice the Beef, Connecticut

1 Sánchez, Bernadette & Hurd, Noelle & Neblett, Enrique & Vaclavik, Danielle. (2018). Mentoring for Black Male Youth: A Systematic Review of the Research. *Adolescent Research Review*. 3. 1-20. [10.1007/s40894-017-0074-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-017-0074-z).

2 Buck, G. (2018). The core conditions of peer mentoring. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 18(2), 190-206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817699659>



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