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## **Waterbury Named One of the *100 Best Communities for Young People* by America's Promise Alliance and ING U.S.**

*Annual Competition Recognizes Communities that Prioritize Youth Education and Well-Being*

(WATERBURY, CT) – Mayor Neil M. O’Leary today announced Waterbury was named one of America’s Promise Alliance’s *100 Best Communities for Young People*. The national award was given to Waterbury to recognize its outstanding and innovative work in addressing the high school dropout crisis and for its programs and services that make it an outstanding place for youth to live, learn and grow.

“Being named one of America’s Promise Alliance’s *100 Best* is significant and meaningful to the entire community,” Mayor O’Leary said. “Over the last year we’ve made progress to help young people reach their potential and play a meaningful, productive role in the society because no one has more at stake in this community than our kids. So many dedicated people and programs contributed to this win and it further reinforces our belief that a focus on youth pays dividends to the entire community.”

Waterbury, a third-time *100 Best* winner, remains committed to ensuring its youth are healthy and develop leadership skills for the future. Each year, the StayWell Health Center provides free medical care for more than 8,000 uninsured or underinsured youth. StayWell also operates the only school-based health center in Waterbury where elementary-aged students receive medical, dental and mental health services without having to miss school. Access to health care is also reinforced by the Waterbury Bridge to Success (BTS) Partnership. This group of parents, community members and organizations work together to create a positive environment for youth that includes a caring school climate, a safe neighborhood and access to healthcare.

Waterbury also offers programs that empower youth to make good decisions and get involved in the community. The Waterbury Youth Council helps teens develop leadership skills and gives them a voice in decisions on community issues. In addition, the YMCA, Waterbury Youth Service Systems, the Police Activities League (PAL), the public schools, and many other community-based agencies, often in partnership, offer many

high-quality summer and after school programs for youth. And, Girls Inc. of Southwestern Connecticut, offers summer and after-school programs that provide girls with strategies to overcome social, intellectual and economic challenges.

*“The 100 Best Communities for Young People award recognizes the hard work of many community members that have dedicated their time to making a difference in the lives of our youth,”* said Dr. Kathleen M. Ouellette, superintendent of schools. As the Waterbury Public School District moves forward into a period of renewed commitment to excellence in teaching for improved student achievement, I am hopeful that the partnerships developed in the Waterbury community for the benefit of children and youth will continue to contribute significantly to the success of all Waterbury students.”

The *100 Best* competition is part of the Grad Nation campaign, a large and growing movement of dedicated individuals, organizations and communities working together to end the dropout crisis. The goal of Grad Nation is to raise the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020, with no school graduating fewer than 80 percent of its students on time.

All communities entering the *100 Best* competition completed a rigorous application where they provided details on how their existing programs and initiatives help deliver the Five Promises—resources identified by America’s Promise as being critical to the development of healthy, successful children: caring adults; safe places; a healthy start; effective educational and opportunities to help others. Applicants also were asked to describe how different sectors of their community work together to help children and families overcome challenges. Most importantly, communities were judged on the strength and innovation of their efforts and programs to help young people graduate from high school prepared for college and the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. Upon recommendation of the Bridge to Success Community Council, and with the assistance of BTS Council members, the city of Waterbury completed and submitted the application.

*“The city of Waterbury has always had a rich history of collaboration,”* said Dr. Dolton James, a Waterbury resident, parent, and volunteer chair of the Bridge to Success partnership. As a result of working together steadily, over 150 parents, citizens, and others who represent over 85 organizations formed the Bridge to Success partnership. We are proud to report that the Waterbury community has embraced the Search Institute 40 Developmental Assets youth need as a common program theme, and that the community is moving forward through the Bridge to Success Workgroups comprised of local volunteers to implement the *Bridge to Success Plan* called Preparing Waterbury Youth for Life: A Birth to 21 Initiative – the first comprehensive youth plan for ages 0-21 in the State of Connecticut.”

Waterbury will receive a \$2,500 grant, signage identifying the community as one of the nation’s 100 Best Communities for Young People, and access to America’s Promise Alliance’s community development resources.

*“As young people across the country go back to school, it is especially timely to recognize communities like Waterbury that have come together to make supporting young people a top priority and that are committed to helping young Americans reach their full potential,”* said John Gomperts, America’s Promise Alliance president and CEO. *“The 100 Best winners are doing outstanding work delivering the Five Promises that create the conditions for all young people to have the best chance for success. We hope the example set by these communities provides inspiration for others to take action.”*

At noon EST on Sept. 12, Gomperts will join America's Promise Alliance Chair Alma Powell and ING Foundation President Rhonda Mims at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., to officially announce the 100 winning communities during a live webcast.

In its sixth year, the competition experienced its greatest interest to date with nominations from more than 320 communities representing all 50 states, Washington, D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. A list of all 2012 winners can be found at [AmericasPromise.org/100Best](http://AmericasPromise.org/100Best). The webcast can be viewed at [AmericasPromise.org/100Bestwebcast](http://AmericasPromise.org/100Bestwebcast).

#### **About America's Promise Alliance**

America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest partnership dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth. We bring together more than 400 national organizations representing nonprofit groups, businesses, communities, educators and policymakers. Through our Grad Nation campaign, we mobilize Americans to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare young people for college and the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. Building on the legacy of our Founding Chairman General Colin Powell, America's Promise believes the success of young people is ground in the Five Promises—Caring Adults, Safe Places, A Health Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Help Others. For more information, visit [www.AmericasPromise.org](http://www.AmericasPromise.org).

#### **About ING U.S.**

ING U.S. constitutes the U.S.-based retirement, investment management and insurance operations of Dutch-based ING Groep N.V. (NYSE: ING). In the U.S., the ING family of companies offers a comprehensive array of financial services to retail and institutional clients, which includes life insurance, retirement plans, mutual funds, managed accounts, alternative investments, institutional investment management, annuities, employee benefits and financial planning. ING U.S. holds top-tier rankings in key U.S. markets and serves approximately 13 million customers across the nation. For more information, visit [www.ing.us](http://www.ing.us).

#### **About the ING Foundation**

The ING Foundation's mission is to improve the quality of life in communities where ING operates and its employees and customers live. Through charitable giving and employee volunteerism, the Foundation focuses on programs in the areas of financial education, children's education and physical education. For more information, visit [www.ing-usafoundation.com](http://www.ing-usafoundation.com) or connect with us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/act2impact](http://www.facebook.com/act2impact)) and Twitter (@INGact2impact).

#### **About Bridge to Success**

The Waterbury Bridge to Success (BTS) Partnership is a group of community members and organizations working together to help our youth succeed in life. We asked our community what they felt was most important to help children birth to 21 develop into responsible, productive citizens. Our BTS plan addresses those concerns, including promoting early literacy, child and youth mental health, healthy nutrition and activity, and supporting and nurturing parent and caregiver skills as their child's first and main teacher. Waterbury's future growth and success depends on its youth. Working together, we will build bridges to strengthen our community's support for children and families.

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