

Appropriations Committee

December 9, 2009 Public Hearing

Testimony Submitted on behalf of
The Boys & Girls Clubs in Connecticut

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriation Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the sixteen Boys & Girls Clubs that serve some 60,000 Connecticut youth ages 6 – 18 each year.

Over the past four fiscal years, our statewide movement has benefitted greatly from the \$3,980,000 appropriation grants that we have been received. Equally important is the fact that this funding has also produced a significant "return" on the investment that the State of Connecticut has made. This return is best reflected in the 19,942 youth members who have benefitted from our SMART Moves drug abuse and harmful behavior resistance training that is recognized nationally as a major factor in reducing juvenile crime. Your legislative funding has also resulted in 14, 434 "at risk" youths being taken off of our urban center streets and brought into our safe haven clubs. Both of these results not only met our commitment to the state, but exceeded our committed targets by an average of 182%. Also of significant is that our grants require a dollar for dollar match from out of state sources. During this four year period, we have been able to leverage our \$3.98M in state grants and have secured both federal and private out-of-state funding amounting to an additional \$4.43M that was then used to better serve our Connecticut youth.

While these numbers by themselves are impressive, you may very well ask "so what?" Let's begin with SMART Moves – a recent Harris poll indicated that 28% of our Boys & Girls Club alumni would have dropped out of high school if it were not for SMART Moves and the Power Hour Homework assistance that they received as club members. While nationally 21% of African American males drop out of high school only 2% of Boys & Girls Club African American males drop out. What is the impact of bringing an "at risk" youth off the streets and into our safe haven clubs. It is significant. Financially, one youth enrolled in our Gang Prevention programs, at an average cost of \$1,114, that does not end up committing a crime because of the program, can be compared to a very conservative cost of \$150,000 to \$200,000 to incarcerate one juvenile.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very comfortable saying that based upon our past performance, the Boys & Girls in Connecticut have proven to be very good stewards of your state funding.

Unfortunately, Governor Rell's November 24th Deficit Mitigation Proposal recommended the elimination of our entire \$1.1M appropriation grant for the next two fiscal years. I respectfully request that the Legislature NOT approve this aspect of the Governor's proposal. The loss of this funding, which represents approximately 5 to 15% of our individual club's annual budget translates into 6,650 Connecticut youth NOT having the advantage of our SMART Moves training. It means that 4,800 "at risk" youths will remain on our urban center streets, subjected to all of the illegal temptations that reside on our streets and NOT be in our safe haven clubs. It means that the potential academic achievement improvement offered by our Power Hour programming will NOT be available to some 30,000 youth who enter our clubhouses every day. It also means that the use of state funds to leverage the acquisition of our-of-state funding will be severely hampered.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Boys & Girls Clubs in Connecticut do not come to you with our hands out seeking a donation of funds. We come to the state offering an investment opportunity that has delivered a substantial return in terms of both financial reward and effective youth development . My request to you today is to continue to allow us to do the good work that you have entrusted to us by virtue of your continued funding commitment. Thank you.