

**TESTIMONY OF KAREN SENICH  
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
HB 5044, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE  
FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

**February 16, 2016**

Good Afternoon. My name is Karen Senich. I am the Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury. We are a part of the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs. The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury ("Club") has been providing safe, after school programs for Greater Waterbury's children and teens for over 128 years. The Connecticut Clubs, combined, serve over 100,000 young people in 35 municipalities; Waterbury is a part of that strong network serving over 230 of Waterbury's young people. On behalf of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Waterbury, our members and their families, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to express my opposition to HB 5044, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017

I am compelled to testify to support the funding of the Boys & Girls Clubs in Connecticut through the Neighborhood Youth Center grants, administered by the Department of Education. These funds represent almost 5½ % of Waterbury's annual budget and the State's steadfast support of the Boys & Girls Clubs and the Clubs' work with young people throughout Connecticut. Begun in fiscal year 1994-95, the Neighborhood Youth Center Program was designed to provide positive experiences for at-risk youth. As intended, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Connecticut, including Waterbury, provide athletic and recreational activities; academic and enrichment programs, including tutoring and mentoring; and other preventative and intervention services for youth and their families. The Clubs provide positive reinforcement and guidance through outcome focused programming stemming the problems facing today's youth. We are dedicated to enabling all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring and responsible citizens.

The Boys & Girls Club believes that there are five key elements to positive youth development: a safe, positive environment; fun; supportive relationships; opportunities and expectations; and recognition. Our programs are designed to incorporate those elements into everything we do – the outcomes being that Club members have higher academic achievement; are more likely to abstain from high-risk behaviors; are more likely to serve their community; and are more likely to engage in regular physical activity. (National Youth Outcomes Initiative, 2014 Outcomes Report, BGCA) A study conducted through a partnership among the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, the Connecticut Department of Education and the Charter Oak Group found that Boys & Girls Club members had lower rates of chronic absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions. (2013-2014)

The revenue provided by the State allows the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury to maintain the cost of the annual membership at seventy-five (\$75.00) dollars; members may come as many days per week throughout the school year and participate in whatever programs they

choose. Ninety-five (95%) percent of our families live below the poverty line. Our Club members are considered “at risk”. Like many other urban areas, Waterbury is riddled with the symptoms of poverty. The members of our Club are at risk of dropping out of school, engaging in drugs, alcohol, tobacco, early sexual activity and violence. This year, 100% of our high school seniors will graduate and continue onto college. 79% of Waterbury students receive free or reduced costs for meals; the state average is 33%. While we realize the significance of the budget deficit, we would respectfully suggest that the positive outcomes that the Boys & Girls Clubs produce justify the State’s support.

In a survey conducted in 2014, the following was reported by Waterbury’s members:

- Over 76% reported feeling safe at the Club
- Over 77% reported having gained new skills and knowledge at the Club
- Over 80% reported that they use what they learn at the Club outside of the Club
- Over 82% reported that they were more confident and felt better about themselves since they started coming to the Club

What does this data tell you? Feelings of safety and trust and being actively engaged in decision-making are critical to productive learning in young people. These measures indicate a positive direction for our youth’s socio-emotional learning. Ultimately, the positive results created by the environment and programming at the Club lead to more positive outcomes for our youth.

It is in the best interest of the young people and the greater Waterbury community that the Boys & Girls Club continues to provide a safe after-school environment. We must continue to provide our extraordinary programming to at risk youth and to provide the safe, fun and nurturing environment that is synonymous with the Boys & Girls Clubs. I strongly urge you to maintain the Neighborhood Youth Center funding through the Department of Education.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.