

**TESTIMONY –Stamford B&G Club
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
HB 5306, AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

February 24, 2016

My name is Michael Cotela . I am the Executive Director of the Stamford Boys and Girls Club. Our club has been providing safe, after school and weekend programs since 1927 to the children of Stamford. The Club, chartered under the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, served over 1500 young people between the ages of 6 – 18 in 2015. On behalf of the Stamford B&G Club, our members and their families, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to express my opposition to HB 5306, An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood Education.

I find it necessary to testify because, if these recommendations are implemented, our B&G Club will be faced with closing programs, limiting memberships and/or raising the cost of membership to a prohibitive amount. Connecticut General Statute’s sec. 19a-77 specifically excludes Boys & Girls Clubs from the definition of “child day care services”. While the drop in after school program is exempt from child day care licensing we are a licensed day camp and, like all 17 Clubs in Connecticut, is subject to the vigorous requirements of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

The Stamford B&G Club is a youth development organization, not a day care, baby-sitter or school readiness provider. The programs we run are driven towards our universal priority outcomes of healthy lifestyles, academic success and good character and citizenship. We believe 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. One of our main objectives is to have youth be able to drop into the club at any time. – the outcome being that Club members are more likely to abstain from high-risk behaviors if they have a safe place always open for them. Because our youth live in our neighborhoods they sometimes come and go multiple times during a day.

Currently, the Stamford B&G Club has 1500 members. Our average daily attendance by members is 450. In 2015, our programs served another 1000 youth who were not members; they either “dropped-in” or participated in a program(s). Our members may come as many or as few days a week as they choose and at the times they choose; parents are not required to tell us on what days their children will attend. This arrangement allows the families we serve the flexibility their circumstance require.

The annual fee for our club membership is \$50 per year. 51 (%) percent of our members are from single family households and 80 (%) percent of our members receive free or reduced cost lunch. The rest of our members come from Asset Limited Income Restrained Employed

households meaning they are above the federal poverty level, but still do not have enough income to afford the basic necessities of life, such as food, child care and housing.

Like many other urban areas, the west side of Stamford 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. Through outcome focused programs that include athletic and recreational activities; enrichment programs, including mentoring and other preventative services, the Club provides positive reinforcement and guidance to teach the skills needed to reduce 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 elimination of the child day care license exemption would change our very successful model of serving our community. Many families need a place that is very affordable, supervised, safe and fun. It would force the Boys & Girls Club of Stamford to significantly raise the cost and type of membership to account for the substantial increase in the cost of operating due to the licensing requirements. We also would no longer be able to serve the high number of young people we currently do. Our members will not go elsewhere – they come to us because of cost, proximity and our safe and fun environment. Our families would require state assistance to pay for after-school programs (increasing the numbers receiving state assistance) and those who did not qualify would no longer be able to participate in the Club activities. These children, especially our teen members, would be on the street or home alone after school – further impeding the progress of these underserved youth.

This proposal undermines the model of the Boys & Girls Clubs, a model which has successfully helped boys and girls all over the state. This proposal will hurt children and families; cost the state more money (in child-care requests, court costs for teens, ect.) This proposal puts futures in jeopardy.

For the sake of our communities and our members, we must be allowed to 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 reject the proposal of the Office of Early Childhood Education that would eliminate the Boys & Girls Clubs' exemption from child day care licensing.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Michael Cotela , Executive Director ----B&G Club of Stamford