

**TESTIMONY OF Mike Flynn, Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield  
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
HB 5306, AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

**February 24, 2016**

My name is Mike Flynn . I am the Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield. Our Club has been providing safe, after school programs for children and teens for over 80 years. The Club, chartered under the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, served over 4200 young people between the ages of 6 – 18 in 2015. On behalf of the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield, 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 am compelled to testify because, if these recommendations are implemented, the Boys & Girls Club here in Ridgefield will be faced with closing, 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 Ridgefield Club is exempt from child day care licensing for its after-school program, it is 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 Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield is a youth development organization, not a day care, baby-sitter or school 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 – 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)

Currently, the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield has 1525 members. Our average daily attendance by members is 250. In 2015, our programs served 2,675 youth who were not members; they either “dropped-in” or participated in a community and or school based program(s) at the Club. Our members may come as many or as few days a week as 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. We do not know, on any given day, how many children at any age will attend the after-school program. This means that we are prepared every day for 250 young people.

Annual membership for after-school at the Ridgefield Club is \$250 per year- it costs the Club \$2,500 to serve each child. Meaning that we only charge a fraction of what it costs us and rely on donors and community to support us so we meet our mission of keeping all fees low and affordable. Additionally, those who cannot pay our low fees receive scholarships. In 2015, we provided over \$120,000 in scholarship dollars.

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 stem 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 destroy our model of serving our community. It would force the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield to have to choose between closing its doors after 80 years or significantly raising 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 be 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 for, in Ridgefield's case, over 80 years. 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.