

TESTIMONY OF TODD CZUPRINSKI
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
HB 5306, AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

February 24, 2016

My name is Todd Czuprinski. I am the Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of New Britain. Our Club has been providing safe, after school programs for children and teens for over 124 years. The Club, chartered under the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, served over 1,700 young people between the ages of 6 – 18 in 2015. On behalf of the Boys & Girls Club of New Britain, 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 of New Britain will be faced with closing, limiting memberships and/or raising the cost of membership to a prohibitive amount. Connecticut General Statutes sec. 19a-77 specifically excludes Boys & Girls Clubs from the definition of “child day care services”.

The Boys & Girls Club of New Britain is a youth development organization. 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 New Britain has 1,700 members. Our average daily attendance by members is 350. 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.

Our annual membership fee is \$50 - \$75. Forty two (%) percent of our members are from single family households and eighty seven (%) percent of our members receive free or reduced cost lunch. Many 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. Most of our members are bused to the Club by their school bus – meaning proximity is also factor in coming to the Club.

Like many other urban areas, New Britain 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 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 New Britain to have to choose between closing its doors after 125 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.

Consider these risks to our local youth, if we cannot continue to serve them:

- We estimate that we would serve 60-70% fewer children if a 1:10 requirement would have to be met. The majority of these members would have no other place to go and would be left unsupervised afterschool. And if we had to start charging fees to meet these ratios it would eliminate many of our members as they would not be able to afford to come. In essence we would no longer serve the kids who need us the most. It would change our whole mission and philosophy.
- In New Britain, hundreds of vulnerable children, youth, and teens will be on the streets during after-school hours with nothing to do. Studies show that unstructured after-school time likely results in more risky behavior, such as:
 - Increase in criminal behavior
 - Higher potential to use and abuse illegal drugs and alcohol
 - Greater chance of teenage (and younger) sexual behavior
- When kids spend unstructured time after school, risky behaviors go up and the costs to our municipalities, counties, and state increase several-fold, and we start a long-term downward spiral.
- As a non-school, academic assistance provider in New Britain, kids would have reduced access to homework club, computer technology training, and academic support. The results would be:
 - More kids would suffer scholastically
 - More teens would be at risk of not graduating from high school

- Fewer teens would have opportunities to explore post-secondary education choices like technical/vocational school or college

This proposal undermines the model of the Boys & Girls Clubs, a model which has successfully helped boys and girls for, in New Britain's case, over 125 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.