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Lower Naugatuck Valley Boys & Girls Club

**H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE  
EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.**

**Appropriations Committee**  
February 16, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and committee members thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs to discuss the proposed elimination of the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant. The elimination of this grant will result in staff cuts, program elimination and the reduction of children served at our clubs. The economic impact of this cut will be most severe for our inner city clubs.

The Alliance consists of seventeen organizations serving 57,000 young people in twenty three towns and cities. Boys and Girls Clubs provide a safe haven that has programs that supplement the school day by providing afterschool educational and recreational opportunities.

Clubs in Connecticut receive funding through the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant and use that funding to implement four programs designed to improve academic success, develop healthy lifestyles and build good character and citizenship in our members. These programs and others like them enable our clubs to extend and reinforce what is being taught in school.

The Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs is a strong partner in the effort to close the achievement gap for so many young people who attend our clubs. Clubs have a very real impact on a young persons life during the critical out of school time. The state of Connecticut has been a great partner in the collective effort to bring opportunities to those children who are challenged by the achievement gap. The budget Governor Malloy has presented puts the breaks on these efforts by eliminating all funding from the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant.

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The Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs is dedicated to measuring the impact of the club experience.

- Research in the Education field has shown for some time that students with frequent absences and behavioral incidents have lower levels of academic achievement and are more likely to drop out of school.<sup>1 2 3 4 5</sup>
- Studies suggest that quality after school programming can influence those risk factors, especially school attendance<sup>6 7 8</sup>.
- Thanks to a new partnership between the Charter Oak Group, the Connecticut Department of Education, and the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, we are now able to see the influence Boys & Girls Clubs have on these risk factors for the members we serve and compare them to their peers across the state.
- In Connecticut, in the 2013-14 school year, almost 11% of the students in grades K-12 statewide were chronically absent (they missed more than 10% of school days).

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Children in Poverty. (2008, Sept.). Present, engaged & accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades. New York, NY: Chang, H. & Romero, M. 7b

<sup>2</sup> Epstein, J. L. & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308-318. 8

<sup>3</sup> Gottfried, M.A. (2010, June). Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 434-465.

<sup>4</sup> Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver, 2007, citing Alexander, K. L.; Entwisle, D. R. and Kabbani, N. S. (2001). "The Dropout Process in Life Course Perspective: Early Risk Factors at Home and School," *Teachers College Record*, 103, 760-822.

<sup>5</sup> Balfanz, R. *Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path: A Policy and Practice Brief* (Westerville, Ohio: National Middle School Association (now known as Association for Middle Level Education), June 2009), <http://www.amle.org/Research/ResearchfromtheField/tabid/1642/Default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Kauh, Tina J., *AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providence's After-School System, Public/Private Ventures*, August 2011

<sup>7</sup> Arbretton, Amy et al, *Making Every Day Count: Boys & Girls Clubs' Role in Promoting Positive Outcomes for Teens*, May 2009

<sup>8</sup> Vile, J.D., Arcaira, E. & Reisner, E.R. *Progress toward high school graduation: Citizen Schools' youth outcomes in Boston*. Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2009



- In a study of more than 6,600 Boys and Girls Club members in Connecticut, we found that our members were 60% less likely to be chronically absent when compared to students across the state.

The Alliance is a statewide entity with the ability to adapt our collective services to the needs of the state and is the optimum partner to provide these critical out of school time services. Please consider restoring the Neighborhood Youth Center funding and let's continue in this work together providing "Great Futures" for the children who need us most in Connecticut.

Below you will find a few testimonials from some of Club member's parents regarding how important and crucial the Boys & Girls Club is to their family. Please consider them and the thousands of other families and households that would be negatively impacted by elimination of the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant.

Thank you for time and consideration regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Richard Marazzi



The Boys & Girls Club in Seymour has been such a huge blessing in both my life and my kid's lives. The Club opened when we needed it the most. From day one, I saw a positive change in my three kids. They learned respect and how to take responsibility for their actions. Their behavior drastically improved.

They LOVE going to the Boys & Girls Club. They are loved, cared for and surrounded by positivity. The entire staff treats them like family. I never have to worry about them when they are at the Club. Not only do they offer support to my children, but to me as well. I wanted to give the Club something special during the holiday season, to show my appreciation for all of their help. Instead, I was given a gift card to help with kid's Christmas.

I was a single mom with no family or support system. The Boys & Girls Club changed all of that for me. Holidays, school vacations and snow days are no longer stressful because they have a safe, fun place to go. Having support has changed our lives. My job is no longer in jeopardy. I am no longer worried about what the future looks like. The Boys & Girls Club has been more than just a place I send my kids. They have improved our lives and I am eternally grateful to them.

- Melissa Gianfrancesco, mother to three Club members

I am a single mother of 5 children. I have three children enrolled in the Boys & Girls Club, and I am planning to send my youngest daughter as soon as she is old enough. I work full time to support my children, which obviously means I have a very busy schedule. Since my kids started attending the Boys & Girls Club two years ago, our lives have been improved so much.

The staff at the Boys & Girls Club helps all of my kids with homework. Before this, I would rush home from work, feed them dinner and get them in bed, with very little time to help them with their homework. I no longer have to worry about this because the staff helps them with their homework and stays on top of their grades. The staff even logs into their school



accounts to check updates from teachers and make sure they are finishing all of their assignments. This has been a huge relief for me.

The Boys & Girls Club has helped me personally as well. When I confessed that we were struggling financially, the Boys & Girls Club provided me with financial assistance, clothing, food and household items to help us get back on our feet. I am so grateful to the Boys & Girls Club for all they have done for me and my kids. I do not know where we'd be without them in our lives.

- Hope Peckam, mother to three Club members

My children have been members of The Boys & Girls Club since 2010 and have been engaged in community activities which have helped them build character as they learn and help their peers. My 16 year-old son has learned about what it means to go to college through the Keystone Club program, where he has had the opportunity to actually experience staying in a dorm overnight and waking up early for class. My 12 year-old daughter has had the opportunity to learn and love basketball through the Travel Basketball program offered at the club, which she is currently still involved in; she is learning through perseverance how to build her self-confidence while working on skills needed to function well in a team.

The club has consistently provided a safe and reliable environment in which I have felt comfortable knowing that my children were in good hands as I worked, went to college and completed my internship hours. I have been able to focus on building a better life for my family because I know that I have the support of the staff at the Boys & Girls Club. I can't recall all the countless times and ways that the staff at the club has helped my family as I worked my way towards a better life. From offering homework assistance to my children to summer camp scholarships so that I can continue working and attending summer college courses, the support I have received from the club is greatly appreciated. Back in 2010, I worked as a service clerk earning minimum wage. Today, thanks to the ongoing support I have received from The



Boys & Girls Club and the reliability that the staff has displayed with the care and instruction of my children, I hold a Master's Degree from Fordham University and am currently a clinical social worker. I never thought it was possible for me to achieve what I have thus far, but what I have learned the most is that it takes a community to raise a child. My family has been fortunate to have The Boys & Girls Club in our community and in our life. I rest assured that my children have the support and opportunity to receive guidance on making good choices and work towards having a positive future at The Boys & Girls Club.

-Parent of Ansonia member of the Joel E Smilow Clubhouse