

**TESTIMONY OF MEGAN ALTOMARE  
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
HB 5306, AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

**February 24, 2016**

My name is Megan Altomare. I am the Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Milford. The Milford Club has been providing safe, educational, and fun after school programs for over 2000 children and teens for over seven years. The Club, chartered under the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, served over 420 young people. On behalf of the Boys & Girls Club of Milford, 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 testifying because, if these recommendations are implemented, the Boys & Girls Club of Milford will be forced to limit our membership, raise our fees, and force our families and members to feel un-needed pressure and stress. Connecticut General Statutes sec. 19a-77 specifically excludes Boys & Girls Clubs from the definition of "child day care services". While the Boys & Girls Club of Milford is exempt from child day care licensing for its after-school program, we are currently working to obtain a license for our summer program.

The Boys & Girls Club of Milford is an after school program for youth in Milford between the ages of 6 and 18. Our after school program provides academic enrichment and recreational activities to help young people improve their lives by building self-esteem and developing values and skills during critical periods of growth through our five core program areas: Character and Leadership Development, Education and Career Development, Health and Life Skills, The Arts, and Sports, Fitness and Recreation. Programming is available during critical times of the day when youth might be home by themselves or otherwise unsupervised with the possibility of being exposed to at risk behaviors. It is facility-based, employs 3 full time and 14 part time paid professional staff members, supplemented by hundreds of volunteers. Young people from throughout the City of Milford can attend the Club from 2:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. We do not know, on any given day, how many children at any age will attend the after-school program. We closely monitor our average daily attendance which is currently 160 youth per day and work to stay within the ratio of 1 staff member to 15 members.

Annual membership for after-school at the Boys & Girls Club of Milford is \$100.00 per year and 22% of our members receive scholarships which are currently provided by the Boys & Girls Club of Milford. 57% of our members are from single family households. As defined by the HUD income limit table 45% of our members are classified as either extremely low or very low. 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.

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 Milford to have to choose between closing its doors after seven 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.

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.

The Boys & Girls Club of Milford takes tremendous efforts to ensure our members are provided with the safest environment possible. We follow all of the standards put in place by Boys & Girls Club of America and have installed additional policies and procedures to ensure their safety and wellbeing. All of our staff, board of directors and volunteers go through background checks and are recertified annually. In addition we hold monthly trainings, some of these topics include mental health training, first aid and CPR, discipline and behavior, mandated reporter training, program training, and sexual abuse prevention training. All of our policies and procedures are reviewed and updated annually. We work with our local police and fire departments to ensure safety drills are being done and our members and staff are prepared if an emergency was ever to occur. In the Milford community our organization is considered a safe sanctuary. It is the place that the youth turn to, to get away from crime, negative behaviors, or household issues.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.