

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY: Stephane R. Barnes
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Re: HB 5306, AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
February 24, 2016

My name is Stephanie R. Barnes and I am the Executive Director of the president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of New Haven, which has been providing safe, quality after school programs for New Haven's children and teens for over 145 years. The Club, chartered under the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, served over 1,600 young people between the ages of 5 – 18 in 2015. On behalf of the Boys & Girls Clubs of New Haven, 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 Clubs of New Haven will be faced with 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"*. While the Boys & Girls Club of New Haven is exempt from child day care licensing for its after-school program, it does operate a licensed day camp during summer and, like all 17 Clubs in Connecticut, is subject to the rigorous requirements and best practices of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of New Haven is a youth development organization, not a day care, baby-sitter or school or school readiness provider. Our programs emphasize 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 Clubs of New Haven has 1,039 registered members. Our average daily attendance by members is 368 during the school year and 279 during the summer months. In 2015, our programs served 554 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; 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 up to 375 young people at four program sites.

Annual membership for after-school at the Boys & Girls Clubs of New Haven is \$20.00 per year. After school fees are \$85.00 per month, but over 60 % of our after school members come at no

cost or subsidized cost. No child is EVER turned away. Over 80% of children served come from single, female heads of household; over 60% of families served live at or below the federal poverty level. Most of our members are bussed to the Club from their schools - meaning proximity is also a factor in coming to the Club.

Like many other urban areas, New Haven 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.

More than a decade of research confirms that quality afterschool programs inspire and motivate children to learn, support children's social and emotional growth, and help raise their academic achievement. However, 109,150 of Connecticut's school-age children (19%) are alone and unsupervised during the hours after school. (*CT After School Alliance, March 2015*). That number would grow significantly if this exemption were eliminated.

The elimination of the child day care license exemption would destroy our model of serving our community – especially the kids that need us most. It would force the Boys & Girls Clubs of New Haven to reduce total members served by nearly 40% and/or significantly raise fees to account for the substantial increase in the cost of operations 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 over a century. Child safety and quality assurance is a priority for Clubs, but the elimination of this exemption without assessment of it's larger effect, would impact children and families in communities like New Haven severely.

For the sake of our communities and our members, we must be allowed to continue to provide our extraordinary programing 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.