March 6, 2019

To: Appropriations Committee

From: David Blagys, Executive Director - Wakeman Boys & Girls Club

Re: H.B. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

I am writing this testimony in support of H.B. 7148 that provides funding of the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant. The Wakeman Boys & Girls Club is a member of the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (the Alliance) and it is through the Alliance that Neighborhood Youth Center Funding is made available to our Boys & Girls Club.

The Alliance consists of fifteen organizations serving 86,000 young people in twenty-two towns and cities across thirty-two Club sites in Connecticut. 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 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 supporting Neighborhood Youth Center funding and lets continue in this work together providing “Great Futures” for the children who need us most in Connecticut.
Perhaps a brief illustration of the work we do is appropriate. This recent account is provided by Laura Magnotta, Unit Director at our Smilow-Burroughs Clubhouse in Bridgeport.

*The Talent Show -* A few weeks ago, 3rd grade Dairya bounded into my office bursting with joy to share the news that she had "Made the Cut!" She exclaimed, "I always knew I had talent, but now someone else sees it too!" I was smiling ear to ear, not only because I was so proud of Dairya for her recognizing how special she was, but that in fact – Everyone had "made the cut" if they tried out.

Dairya didn’t need to know that small detail. She knew she needed to get to work. Every time I would see her around the clubhouse, she was busy preparing for the upcoming Wakeman Talent Show. She was singing a solo and choreographing a dance with her friend Coral and finally for those few weeks she would forget about the girl drama and petty conversations. She had a purpose and something to work towards. She grew more confident (if that was possible) and came to visit me again on the day of the show. I asked her how she was feeling and she admitted she was "a little nervous, but really excited." Her mom couldn’t make it because she was working, but she knew she would have all of the staff watching. I don’t think we have the next Jennifer Lopez on our hands, but in a few years, you never know!

*Wakeman Boys & Girls Club is about building up confidence and having youth members trying new and positive things. Dairya never had been in a talent show, and now because of an after-school opportunity at the Club, she was a STAR in one!*

Across the Connecticut’s cities and towns, the cries for quality, affordable after-school programs continue to ring loud and clear. Boys & Girls Clubs have been answering this call for over 100 years, creating countless stars, one child a time.

We are grateful for the Appropriation Committee’s consideration of H.B. 7148.