I am Karen Senich and I am the Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury. We are a part of the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs. The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury (“Club”) has been providing safe, after school programs for Greater Waterbury’s children and teens for over 130 years. The Connecticut Clubs, combined, serve over 86,000 young people in twenty-two towns and cities across thirty-two Club sites in Connecticut. Waterbury is a part of that strong network serving over 500 of Waterbury’s young people and provide a safe haven that has programs that supplement the school day by providing afterschool educational and recreational opportunities.

On behalf of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury, our members and their families, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to express my support of H.B. No. 7148 which includes funding to the Alliance through the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant. Clubs in Connecticut receive that funding through Alliance 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. The Clubs have a very real impact on a young person’s 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, through its member Clubs, has the ability to adapt the collective services to the needs of the state and is the optimum partner to provide these critical out of school time services.

Begun in fiscal year 1994-95, the Neighborhood Youth Center Program was designed to provide positive experiences for at-risk youth. As intended, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Connecticut, including Waterbury, provide athletic and recreational activities; academic and enrichment programs, including tutoring and mentoring; and other preventative and intervention services for youth and their families. The Club provides positive reinforcement and guidance through outcome focused programing stemming the problems facing our youth. By providing a wide range of educational and recreational opportunities, a safe environment, and supportive relationships, the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury helps young people who need it most discover their interests, have a positive outlook for their future, and be confident, successful stewards of their communities.
I hope that you will continue to support the Neighborhood Youth Center funding for the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs and let’s continue in this work together providing by “Great Futures” for the children who need us most in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.