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February 19, 2024

Senator Joe Baldacci
Representative Michele Meyer
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: Support of LD 2197 - An Act to Strengthen the Health, Well-being and Academic Success of Children and Their Families Through Increased Community Support of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ken Walsh, and I am the CEO of the Alfond Youth and Community Center in Waterville, and I am writing in support of LD 2197.

Boys & Girls Clubs across Maine provide much needed after school resources to thousands of youths each year. In addition to our collective work supporting kids and teens with programming that helps them become valuable citizens, our organization is also building much needed programs for work-force development so that each of our members have a pathway to success after graduating from High School. As an example, our partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates is helping to accelerate skill building for teens coupled with practical internships and career exploration.

We are supporting this bill as the project the Boys & Girls Club of Southern Maine is undertaking in building the *Bridge to Success* Teen Center will augment the work we are doing. The Bridge to Success Center in Portland will act as an important pilot program for my Club and others across the State to learn from as their program will allow for career exploration and practical training on-site.

The opportunity for all Clubs in Maine to learn from each other and build on respective approaches further supports our collective work across the entire State. Our endeavors provide all young people, undeterred by resources, with an unprecedented opportunity to learn in a safe and supportive environment that encourages participation and success in higher education or the trades. An opportunity most of the youth we serve would not otherwise have.

Support of this bill not only contributes to the overall goals of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southern Maine, but also goes a long way in supporting the development and growth of all of Maine's youth as they grow into our workforce of the future.

I strongly support LD 2197 and encourage you to do the same.

Respectfully,

Ken Walsh
Chief Executive Officer