

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am submitting testimony in 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.

My name is Mark Duval and I live in Cape Elizabeth. I am the former Chair of the Southern Maine Community College Foundation Board and currently serve on SMCC's Automotive Advisory Council. In 1985, I started my own business, Duval's Service Center, and operated it for more than 35 years. I recently sold the business to one of my long time employees. He and his staff (many of whom have been with Duval's for over eighteen years) continue to provide trusted automotive services to customers throughout Cumberland County.

As you can imagine, the automotive service industry has changed immensely since I started my shop in 1985. Back then, you'd work on a car with one or two computers and by the end of the day you'd be covered in grease. Now, most gas-powered vehicles have more than 80 onboard computers, all networked together. The circuitry and systems for hybrid and electric vehicles are even more complex. And, you go home a lot cleaner.

Just like the plumbing and electrical trades, the automotive service industry needs more trained technicians to keep up with the demand. It's important to get young people interested in the trades early and keep them interested. It's also important to remove the stigma that still exists around trades. After two years, students graduating as A-level automotive, plumbing and electrical technicians are able to earn \$100,000+ salaries.

The Boys & Girls Clubs' Bridge to Success will open this world to many more kids, starting in middle school and continuing through high school. This innovative program will provide the technology, expertise and space to explore careers and gain hands on experience.

Even more importantly, Bridge to Success will provide young people with the support critical to succeed in any field. When I coached Little League, I learned most about my players by watching who showed up for them. The Boys & Girls Clubs show up for their members. The Clubs offer a support system too many kids don't have in their lives. Bridge to Success will extend this support system to include career guidance and mentorship to teens. Those are the years when it's important to keep kids interested and engaged.

The lack of trained technicians is a serious issue facing our state. We need more, but high schools across Maine are struggling to find the space, capacity and money to open their programs to more students. Bridge to Success can help by serving as a model to help kids learn early about careers, especially in the trades, and better prepare them to enter the real world when they graduate. Often students' education is considered complete once they receive a high school diploma. Bridge to Success could furnish these students with skills and insight into the idea that there are opportunities for them after high school.

The Boys & Girls Clubs' Bridge to Success program is a sound investment in the future of our young people and our workforce. I wholeheartedly support funding LD 2197.

Thank you for your time.