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Testimony of Erin Gray before
the Committee on Health and Human Services
in support of

**LD 1389: An Act to Create the Building Opportunity Through
Out-of-School Time Program**

April 04, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Erin Gray and I'm the Senior Program Director at the Boothbay Region YMCA. I support LD 1389: *An Act to Create the Building Opportunity Through Out-of-School Time Program*.

The 15 YMCAs in Maine are collectively the largest childcare provider in the state. We served 24,000 school-age children last year through before/afterschool care, summer camp, and youth sports. These safe, nurturing, and enriching programs are essential for working parents and our economy. Research shows these programs boost student engagement, improve attendance, reduce risky behaviors, and promote social-emotional growth. With access to homework help, healthy meals, and trusted mentors, kids thrive both in and out of the classroom.

YMCA school-age youth programs are consistently at capacity, with long waitlists across many sites. While we work hard to stretch resources and fundraise to keep programs affordable and accessible, our ability to expand is limited by challenges like staffing, space, and transportation. In addition, we're seeing a significant rise in behavioral challenges among the children we serve, and we need more resources to support them effectively.

The BOOST bill is an exciting step toward expanding access to school-age childcare for Maine families, especially those that are at-risk or underserved. This grant program would help community-based organizations, including the YMCA, create new programs, grow existing ones, and overcome barriers that prevent families from accessing quality care.

At the Boothbay Y, we see a cycle of families who need childcare, but also have a hard time affording it. In addition to our usual roster, we have many families who utilize us for childcare during school vacation weeks, as they still need to work. Our summer camp programs are also robust and we serve up to 207 children a week, 9 weeks out of the summer months. Many of our summer-based programs for certain ages are at capacity with waitlists.

For both after-school and summer camp waitlists, our biggest challenges are staffing and ratios. While I believe very strongly in lower ratios to staff with smaller children, those ages are generally the ones that have our longest waitlists, and we can't take more children until we can adequately staff.

Increased financial resources would help us better serve our community in a plethora of ways. In addition to allowing us to hire more staff, we could utilize resources for supporting children with challenging behaviors and explore more mental health support options. Also, with budget cuts, we have picked up the entire cost of providing healthy snacks, which has become a financial burden.

We are proud to be an organization that serves our families in many ways to keep our kids healthy, set them up for academic and social success, and have a safe space for them. I look forward to seeing what happens with the BOOST bill to better serve our thriving community.

Respectfully submitted,
Erin Gray

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