

*Investments in out-of-school learning programs are the foundation for
safe,
thriving communities*

**Testimony in support of LD 1389 An Act to Create the Building Opportunity
Through Out-of-School Time Program
to the Health and Human Services Committee
Tuesday, April 8, 2025, 1 p.m.
By Jason Moen, Auburn Chief of Police,
and President of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association**

Chairs Ingwersen and Meyer, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Auburn Chief of Police Jason Moen. I am also currently serving as President of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association. I offer my testimony in support of LD 1389, An Act to Create the Building Opportunity Through Out-of-School Time Program.

As Auburn's Chief of Police, I take a comprehensive view of what it takes to build a safe community. Through my years of experience in law enforcement, I've learned that there is no path toward that goal that does not require giving kids every opportunity to succeed through proven, research-based programs. I'm not alone in that opinion; I offer this testimony on behalf of more than a hundred other top law enforcement executives from every corner of the state who are members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Maine. My fellow police chiefs and sheriffs have reached the same conclusion I have: smart investments in kids today mean less burden on the criminal justice system tomorrow.

Because law enforcement leaders understand that connection, we support the bill before you today, which would be a modest investment to support more community-based organizations to build and operate more school-age child care for children ages 5 to 13, with a priority given first to at-risk and underserved children. This funding could support the creation of new out-of-school time programming, the expansion of existing programming to serve the needs of more children and working parents, and the reduction of barriers for children to access programs.

There are many reasons to support more out-of-school time programming for young children, but I want to focus on reducing risky behaviors and increasing health and wellness.

Out of school programs include access to healthy meals and snacks. And anyone who is a parent or spends time with young children know that when they are hungry, their behaviors change.

Attending afterschool programs has been shown to help reduce problem behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance conduct problems, and drugs use.

I want to share with the Committee something law enforcement has known for many decades: the prime time for violent juvenile crime are the hours between 3 p.m. – 7 p.m. Offering students safe, healthy and nurturing programs during those critical hours can steer them away from bad decisions and often the influence of bad adults, that can have lifelong negative implications.

Parent reports tell us that afterschool programs help their children develop needed social skills and provides needed physical activities to help children grow healthy bodies. These building blocks are cornerstones to later healthy and productive decision making.

We also know that out-of-school programs offer students additional caring adults in their lives, who often serve as mentors. Creating such relationship are particularly important for those children who are at-risk. Data shows that children who have mentors are more likely to engage in productive and beneficial activities than those without mentors.

Here in Auburn back in 2013, our Police Department looked at four years of crime data and found that twenty three percent of all crimes committed by youth offenders in Auburn took place within an area of less than half a square mile. Twenty five percent of all police calls for service and twenty eight percent of all youth victims were victimized in this same area.

In an effort to transform these statistics and provide positive, horizon-broadening experiences for at-risk youth in our city, the Auburn Police Department established the Auburn Police Activities League (PAL).

Auburn's City Council turned over a vacant city property at 24 Chestnut Street, and in the spring of 2013, the Auburn PAL Center opened, right at the heart of the half-square mile area identified by crime data. The Center provides educational and athletic activities for kids after school and during the summer, not to mention positive interaction with police officers. Since that time, we have seen significant reductions in youth-involved criminal activities, and fewer youth victims.

The BOOST program proposed in this bill can help prevent children from engaging in risky behaviors and juvenile crime. I am pleased to support this effort and encourage the Committee to pass this bill and begin the hard work to fund it.