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Testimony of Ann Tikkanen, 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 4, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ann Tikkanen and I am the Chief Executive Officer at the Mount Desert Island 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/after school care, summer camp, and youth sports. Here on Mount Desert Island, we serve 50 children every day in all of these programs. 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.

YMCA school-age youth programs are consistently at capacity, and here on MDI we know we could increase our license and serve more children with more financial resources. While we work hard to stretch money and fundraise to keep programs affordable and accessible, our ability to expand is limited by challenges such as staffing (both finding staff and providing sufficient compensation and employee benefits), space (our Y on the island is too small and in need of an expansion), and transportation (children attend our program throughout the island for which the roads are often challenging and too long a drive for parents). 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.

Increased funding for out-of-school time programs are essential on the island and will have the following positive impacts:

- More and more working families who live on the island, and many more who travel onto the island, could depend on the MDI Y for productive learning and physical fitness time (rather than their child or children spending aimless hours elsewhere!).
- We could increase the number of children in our care every day, from 50 to 60 if we are able to attract more qualified childcare staff – in other words, we need the funds to make the rate of pay more competitive.
- The MDI Y is a comprehensive facility for all school age children of all abilities, and offers a safe environment for sports offered in the large gymnasium, aquatic safety and learn-to-swim classes in the pool, "club" activities such as chess and art classes, and a kitchen for healthy snacks. Low income families are offered reduced cost or free programs and services for all that the Y provides.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Tikkanen

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