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Auburn/Lewiston Boys & Girls Club
LD 1389

Open letter testimonial for the Maine Legislature in support of the B&GC

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

The importance of the Boys & Girls Clubs in our communities is a resource every community needs and should have.

As a 60+ yo man in semi-retirement and with physical limitations I'm very grateful to have so much fun as a staff member with our B&GC kids in Auburn & Lewiston. In fact, this is my second tour, as they say. I was once the Art teacher many years ago.

One late afternoon, just a few years ago from now, I was at a local restaurant and a young man came up to me to say hi, he looked very familiar. With him was his wife and two children. The minute he spoke I knew who he was. He was one of the kids I had worked with more than 25 years ago. After the wonderful initial reflection and hugs he introduced me to his wife. She said she knew me and that it was great to finally meet. Telling me our friend confided in her about me and about how much I cared for him, how what I had told and taught him had saved his life. He stood there looking at me nodding his head and crying with gratitude. After a few more minutes talking and sharing, we hugged more and I let him regain his composure so his family could go enjoy their dinner. A strong young man, the youngest of four or five siblings. I feel him even now as I write & still see him on occasion. I've always had strong connections with kids and have been involved in the lives of so many - outside of the club or any organized program all my life. It's why I rejoined the B&GC.

When it comes to after school programs, especially with the cost of childcare, there is no place quit like the Boys & Girls Club's. As a national organization it's certainly well built, well planned and has incredible reach. As staff we are constantly trained and re-trained keeping us on top of best practices and safety training for our kids.

Great spaces for kids are very scarce so any and all support is paramount to their well-being. As we all know parenting these days can be challenging. Some certainly have it easier than others and the B&GC has huge value to a single mom or single dad or a moms & dads going through life's struggles and trying to raise good kids. Let's not forget, more affluent families with more resources & support are not the ones that need their kids to be members of the B&GC. Our families run the gamut of our communities in every conceivable way. Many of our member kids are at risk and desperately need well organized and caring clubs with dedicated and warm staff.

The members of the B&GC's make new friends and join new activities or groups and they know the staff really care for them, want the best for them and they know they are important. They get snacks every day, usually twice, they get a full meal - everyday! They get enrichment programming, as well as, sports, arts and STEM throughout the school year. During our summer programming they go on many field trips to the beach, destination parks fun (I personally take multiple sailing trips with groups of kids to Portland Harbor at a wonderful Sailing School on-profit - its amazing for these kids - many of whom cannot even swim). Special water safety courses are offered to all ages of kids to keep them safe around the many water resources in our state. They are also offered full-week camping trips. They also get just enough scholastic programming during the summer to ensure they don't slide back, in learning, before they get to their next grade. This is an important factor for their success and continuity of learning.

The togetherness and relationships these kids acquire, and the multitude of different kids they are engaging with and enjoying as friends, carries with it such important growth and imprints for their future kindness, acceptance of others and individual strength. It's wonderful to be a part of.

There should be as many Boys & Girls Club's as the children & parents need in every

town. Most have a continuous waiting lists. Our clubs, in Auburn/Lewiston, can be at capacity on any given day so expanding our resources and spaces is an absolute necessity. In fact, neither the Auburn Clubhouse or our Lewiston Teen Center have much outdoor space - which would be a fantastic expansion idea.

It is with all my heart, in the care for our kids, that I urge you all to move mountains to make this legislature a reality & to periodically revisit this in study and in-person in case it warrants further expansion. These kids deserve all we can give them.

Thank you for your time & consideration.

Michael A. Koch