



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Tina Jennings 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 08th, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Tina Jennings and I'm the Director of Community & Youth Engagement at the YMCA of Auburn-Lewiston. 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.

- I run a FREE Drop-In Afterschool Enrichment Program for some of Lewiston's most At-Risk youth. We are housed within a city housing complex property, with a 73% New Mainer population and over 250 children residing in 94 units. We have 120 of those children on our roster! Many of these kids are "latchkey", some hold the responsibility of supervising their younger siblings and many used to spend their afternoons roaming the complex alone or with groups of friends. Our program provides a safe space, with trained staff that care and want to see them succeed!
- Our program provides mentorship, homework assistance, financial literacy, the beginning of career exploration and responsibilities, social-emotional programming, conflict resolution skills, nutrition education, basic life skills and exposure to opportunities they wouldn't have. In addition, we provide the children with a meal and a snack, which helps to combat the food insecurity that is prevalent.
- In the summer, we provide day-long camp programming as well.
- We would have the ability to provide more robust programming to more children if we had additional staff, however, being a free mission-based program means our budget is extremely tight. We do try to gain funds through grants but that is a very competitive source of income.
- Additional funding would help us to hire more staff to meet the larger need of the youth population that we serve. We could invest in better programming equipment, utilize funds for more robust experiences, bring in outside trainers for teens, and perhaps buy a vehicle for job training and trips!

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- In this community, we have seen a significant shift in behaviors and general manners. We see less fighting as a result of conflict, we see children showing true empathy for their peers and neighbors, improved relationships between children and parents and a growth mindset in the children themselves. They believe that they can achieve their goals, reach their dreams and make an impact on their community and the world. This is important work!

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Jennings

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