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Testimony of Representative Kelly Murphy in support of

LD 2197, An Act to Strengthen the Health, Well-being and Academic Success of Children and Their Families Through Increased Community Support of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine.

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Kelly Murphy. I represent House District 125 in Scarborough. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of **LD 2197, An Act to Strengthen the Health, Well-being and Academic Success of Children and Their Families Through Increased Community Support of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine.**

I recently had the honor of serving as House Chair of the Task Force to Study the Creation of a Comprehensive Career and Technical Education System. This Task Force was staffed with educators and administrators with special expertise in career and technical education, as experts in the trades and representatives of the Legislature and the Governor's office. Together, we focused on two central questions. First, what is the potential for establishing a comprehensive four-year high school career and technical education program in our state? And second, how can we promote and align the multiple pathways that currently exist for students seeking career and technical expertise before graduating high school?

In conducting our review of the state's existing programs, one thing became clear: comprehensive career and technical education is an essential part of our education system, and the Legislature should support the breadth, depth and accessibility of such offerings. These programs provide pathways for students to explore careers in the trades, artisanal fields, and other jobs that do not require a four-year degree; such roles can offer Mainers stable, fulfilling work experience and a pathway to the middle class while providing crucial services to Maine communities and families at a moment when workforce shortages are at an all-time high. These programs can serve as a supplement to a traditional high school pathway, or they can serve as the primary vehicle for landing a job in a related field directly after school. In all cases, Maine's students, families and communities stand to benefit from the broad array of occupational and personal opportunities that such programs help to forge.

The Commission found that programs are most effective when they can most closely align with the student's needs for their personal and professional learning and accordingly recommended that the state support its existing 27 CTE centers and regions in growing their capacity, growing their offerings and growing accessibility to students. This legislation before you offers us the ability to do exactly that.

The Boys and Girls Club of Southern Maine's Bridge to Success program, which only began three years ago, has already become an exemplary model for programs that aim to offer a range of career exploration opportunities, both to make visible and newly accessible a range of great career choices and as part of a larger mission to help Maine's students grow and develop personally. This program offers homework help, tutoring, and career exploration programs with the goal that every student, of which there are now fifty, graduates from high school on time with a plan for their future, whether they wish to move on to community college, the trades, or a 4-year college or university.

The program has room to grow, though, and it is so exciting to hear that the Club has made strides towards greatly expanded capacity through their work on the new Bridge to Success center. This space will allow at least 250 students to intensify their studies, develop their passions, and build essential skills; through dedicated spaces, they will be able to offer enhanced programs in culinary arts, academics, STEM (including virtual reality), hospitality, health and wellness and a great number of other fields. Students will have the freedom to explore fields that interest them, with an eye toward crafting a path to the future that works for them.

This center has the ability to help them do so and to offer a model for other programs looking to do the same. If we are to fully develop and promote career and technical education as a state, we must look for opportunities to support those programs that are already doing this great work at the local and regional level and allow such programs to expand and shape-shift in response to community need with an eye towards developing a comprehensive statewide CTE infrastructure.

I wholeheartedly believe that the Bridge to Success Center project aligns closely with the Legislature's vision to offer Maine's youth opportunities to grow personally, professionally and occupationally, and we should invest in it accordingly. I urge you to support this bill and welcome any questions you may have.