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Senator Joe Baldacci  
Representative Michele Meyer  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

***Oral testimony 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***

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Dajuan Eubanks and I am the President of the Maine Celtics. I also serve as the Board Chair of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine. I am honored to follow Brian's insightful testimony to provide further context and advocacy for LD 2197.

Maine has been my home since 2005. I was born and raised in the south, and prior to this I've traveled quite extensively, being fortunate enough to see the world in various capacities. As I began making this community home, I recognized that my passion for inspiring, empowering, and encouraging youth to be stewards of their own future could exist and in fact have an impact here.

My involvement with the Clubs came by way of my professional existence 15 years ago with the Maine Red Claws – now the Maine Celtics. Through this experience I quickly witnessed the importance and impact the Clubs provided youth in need, not just as a safe space but as an extension of their families in some instances and a much-needed lifeline to survive their circumstances. I am a strong believer that marginalization can be minimized by providing adequate access and exposure to resources for those in need. Improvements to the Boys and Girls Club of Southern Maine will allow more youth opportunities to make better choices to help shape their future. This is why I am excited to stand before you in support of LD 2197.

As Brian articulated, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southern Maine have been unwavering in our commitment to empowering young people, especially those facing adversity, to achieve their full potential. With a rich history spanning over a century, our organization has been a beacon of hope and opportunity for the youth of Portland and its surrounding communities.

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As a leader in the corporate community, I am acutely aware of the profound impact that investments in youth development can have on the broader economic and social fabric of our state. By equipping young people with the skills, resources, and support they need to thrive, we not only uplift individuals and families but also cultivate a more prosperous and inclusive society.

The establishment of the Bridge to Success Teen Center at BGCSM's Portland Clubhouse presents a unique opportunity to serve as a pilot model for similar initiatives across the state. By developing innovative approaches to career and college readiness tailored to the needs of youth in Southern Maine, this center will serve as a blueprint for other communities grappling with similar challenges.

Through careful evaluation and documentation of the center's programs and outcomes, we aim to create a replicable framework that can be adapted and implemented in diverse socio-economic contexts throughout Maine. By fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders, we envision a network of Teen Centers statewide, each equipped to empower young people with the skills and support they need to succeed in an increasingly competitive workforce landscape.

Furthermore, the Bridge to Success Teen Center will play a pivotal role in setting the tone for the state's investment in workforce development. By prioritizing the holistic growth and preparation of young adults for meaningful careers, Maine can position itself as a leader in cultivating a skilled and resilient workforce for the future.

The center's focus on providing practical assistance, mentoring, and experiential learning opportunities aligns with the state's economic goals of attracting and retaining talent, fostering innovation, and driving sustainable growth. As we invest in the next generation of workers, we not only strengthen our state's economy but also create pathways to prosperity for all Maine residents, ensuring that no one is left behind in our collective pursuit of success.

In conclusion, I urge this committee and legislature to consider the immediate benefits that LD 2197 can bring to Maine's most vulnerable youth. Your partnership and support are instrumental in making a meaningful difference in the lives of tens of thousands of children and teens, empowering them to overcome barriers, achieve their aspirations, and contribute positively to our state's future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available to address any inquiries you may have regarding this vital project.

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