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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Testimony of Senator Teresa S. Pierce 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

February 20, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Senator Teresa Pierce, and I represent the five and a half communities in Cumberland County that make up Senate District 25. I'm pleased to offer 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."

Since 1909, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine have provided valuable support and resources to generations of youth across the region. Students, ages 6-18, benefit from tutoring programs, transportation services, art classes, sports leagues, and career exploration.

BGCSM is looking to expand their career exploration programming by constructing a Bridge to Success Center in 2025. This 16,000 square foot center will provide a safe and structured environment for middle and high school students to grow their interests and explore their passions. With a planned Career Exploration Lab, Teaching Kitchen, and Tech Hub focusing on STEM and new technology, this space will allow youth to develop essential workforce skills and make lasting friendships and connections. The Center also plans on serving as a Community Partner Hub, creating programming with local institutions, community colleges, and trade associations.

Simply put, if we are serious about developing the workforce and building an economy for the future, while supporting our youth going through a critical stage in life, centers such as the Bridge to Success Center are vital to help elevate and propel our industry leaders of tomorrow. BGCSM works to help uplift youth coming from lower income families and BIPOC youth. Youth involved in weekly programming are also significantly less likely to use drugs and tobacco products.

The proposed bill asks for a targeted investment in a proven, trusted, and low cost safe place for students to thrive academically and socially. Expanding the impact of BGCSM with the creation of the Bridge to Success Center is a win for Maine's families, students, and communities. BGCSM has benefitted youth in my district and across Southern Maine. Thank you, Speaker Talbot Ross, for presenting this bill, and I'm happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.