

Dear Committee Chairs Senator Baldacci and Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee,

I am Reihaneh Maarefdoust, Adrina's mom, and we are grateful for the chance to share our story with you. We came from Iran about eight months ago and as you may know, our country has imposed new, additional, restrictions on women working in Iran and on young girls' in schools. While awaiting my spouse's visa, I navigate this new life as a single mom. I am a Computer Science graduate student at USM and have teaching assistant responsibilities that occur after school hours. When the after-school program filled up and they were unable to accept my daughter in August 2023, I faced a very difficult situation managing time between the university and caring for my daughter. Fortunately, a kind friend as an angel came into my life and suggested the Boys and Girls Club.

Families like us move to make a better future for their children, aiming to protect them from the challenges faced in their home countries. Starting anew can be tough, especially for kids who have experienced difficult situations. Fortunately, the Boys and Girls Club provides a safe space where kids not only feel secure but also experience a sense of freedom.

I've observed kids at the club forming close connections with the adults, going beyond mentorship to create a family-like bond. This closeness is remarkable and positively impacts the children.

The club plays a vital role by supporting the interests of all kids, bringing together children from different cultures and families. During special events like Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day, the club ensures families like ours, unfamiliar with American traditions, feel welcomed and cared for.

Just two weeks ago, the club had a special art show with art made by the kids. It was amazing to see all the different talents and creative ideas from the young minds. This art event not only makes the kids feel good about themselves and more confident but also motivates them to keep doing art as something important. Many families, including ours, can't pay for extra classes to help our kids get better at things like art. But the Boys and Girls Club helps fill that gap.

Since arriving in Portland, the Boys and Girls Club has become a small piece of paradise for us. The kindness and support from everyone at the club have made our transition much smoother, allowing us to pursue our dreams in this new world.

Adrina expresses her love for the club in a letter: "I love The Boys and Girls Club because they are kind, and when we need help, they help us."

In simpler terms, the Boys and Girls Club understands that investing in kids means investing in the future. Their approach creates a safe and caring space that aligns with our goal of providing a better life for the next generation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your support for LD 2197 will help the Boys and Girls Club continue to invest in the well-being and future of children. It would mean a lot to families like ours who depend on the club and we hope you'll consider allocating the necessary budget to ensure the Boys and Girls Club can keep making a positive impact on the children's lives.

Sincerely,

Reihaneh Maarefdoust