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H.B. 6439 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Appropriations Committee

March 1, 2021

I am writing this testimony in support of H.B. 6439 that provides funding of the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant. The Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield is a member of the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (the Alliance) and it is through the Alliance that the Neighborhood Youth Center Funding is made available to Boys & Girls Clubs.

The Alliance consists of sixteen organizations serving 85,000 young people in twenty-two towns and cities across thirty-two Club sites in Connecticut. Boys & Girls Clubs provide a safe haven that has programs that supplement the school day by providing afterschool educational and recreational opportunities.

Since 1936, the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield has provided programs and services to youth ages 6-18 from Ridgefield and the surrounding communities, including Bethel, Redding, Danbury, New Fairfield, Wilton, and other nearby towns. In times of adversity, the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield is part of our community response. For 84 years, our Club has navigated times of tragedy and crisis to provide safe places for kids and teens. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March of 2020, we once again rose to the occasion to meet the ever-changing needs of our Club members, our families, and our community.

We provided groceries and fresh meals to those facing food insecurity, hosted pop-up food pantries, distributed PPE supplies to local businesses, held teen and tween mental health check-ins, secured holiday meals and gifts for those struggling, and partnered with a local oil company to keep homes heated throughout the winter. Last June, we ran a safe and successful 8-week essential summer camp program, before quickly transitioning in September to begin supporting children who needed supervision and educational support on “Virtual Learning Days”, while also opening for after-school programs. At the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield, like our fellow Boys & Girls Clubs in Connecticut, we are committed to helping our Club members and their families recover from this crisis.

Clubs in Connecticut receive funding through the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant and use that funding to implement four programs designed to improve academic success, develop healthy lifestyles, and build good character and citizenship in our members. These programs, and others like them, enable our clubs to extend and reinforce what is being taught in school.

The Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs is a strong partner in the effort to close the achievement gap for so many young people who attend our clubs. Clubs have a very real impact on a young person's life during the critical out of school time. The state of Connecticut has been a great partner in the collective effort to bring opportunities to those children who are challenged by the achievement gap.

At the Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield, our vision is to provide a world-class Club Experience that assures success is within reach of every young person who enters our doors, with all members on track to graduate from high school with a plan for the future, demonstrating good character and citizenship, and living a healthy lifestyle. We value ourselves as an integral part of the community and collaborate with over 45 community agencies to operate a plethora of programs that serve the youth and families of Ridgefield. We partner closely with Ridgefield Public Schools, Ridgefield Social Services, the Department of Children and Family Services, and the Ridgefield Police Department to provide support and guidance to the youth who need them the most. The Club staff is also in frequent communication with High School, Middle School, and Elementary School administration and guidance counselors to identify and support the most vulnerable and at-risk youth in our community.

We provide programs to motivate our members to develop good study habits while reinforcing the importance of academic effort. In Power Hour, our education staff works hand-in-hand with parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and school support staff to create individualized plans for members who need additional support. Project Learn's strategy is based on research demonstrating that students do much better in school when they spend their non-school hours engaged in fun, but academically beneficial activities. Our Club Tech program focuses on creating learning opportunities using a variety of software applications in the Club's technology center.

Education is always at the forefront of our mission. In fact, our Ridgefield Club was the recipient of Boys & Girls Clubs of America's National Honor Award for Academic Success programming—only one of these awards is granted each year to one Club out of 4,200 across the country. The National Honor Award for Best Overall Education Program recognizes Clubs that develop education programs that complement and reinforce what youth learn during the

school day by providing opportunities to practice skills for academic and post-secondary success. The Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield was specifically recognized for our ongoing efforts to develop and implement education programs that are rooted in social-emotional development practices, enable all youth to be effective, engaged, and adaptive learners who are on track to a great future, and create experiences that invite all youth to fall in love with learning.

The Alliance is a statewide entity with the ability to adapt our collective services to the needs of the state and is the optimum partner to continue to provide these critical out-of-school time services. Please consider supporting the Neighborhood Youth Center funding and let's continue in this work together providing "Great Futures" for the children who need us most in Connecticut.