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Wakeman Boys & Girls Club

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. Wakeman Boys & Girls Club is a member of the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (the Alliance) and it is through the Alliance that Neighborhood Youth Center Funding is made available to our Boys & Girls Club.

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.

COVID-19 has had a profound impact on Wakeman Boys & Girls Club, our members, and their families, along with all other nonprofit organizations. It has brought uncertainty and disruption to the community we serve, but our top priority has not changed: the health and safety of the children we serve. Below are some of the proactive steps that we took to protect the well-being of our members and to ensure that we continue our important work:

1. Senior Management conducted virtual meetings daily and worked closely with our Finance and Safety Committee to establish safe organizational protocols.
2. We established a more consistent communication system while working remotely to stay attuned to the ever-changing local and national landscapes.
3. The staff responded as needed to daily guideline updates from the Bridgeport & Fairfield Board of Educations and the local and state health departments.
4. We determined what resources we could provide to our kids and families, while the Club sites were closed and put plans into action.
5. We utilized virtual resources provided by Boys & Girls Clubs of America to continue to connect and engage with Club members remotely.
6. We initiated additional procedures to ensure that our Clubhouses are clean and sanitized, and that those who enter are symptom-free.

Staff engaged virtually with club members daily via social media: Facebook, Instagram, and the Club website. Much of their work was prepared behind the scenes with a variety of media/communications software. Staff posted daily activities on “Wakeman @ Home” for members to participate in STEAM and physical education activities. 5 sessions of virtual programming were offered daily during vacation week.

In spring 2020, a survey was sent to all Wakeman Boys & Girls Club members to assess their family’s current needs. Questions included food access, employment concerns, and virtual programming. Parents shared that they were interested in active programs for their children

and that too much screen time was problematic. Staff also made hundreds of phone calls home to families of our most engaged members to find out how we could help. As a result, Wakeman Boys & Girls Club:

- Hosted free virtual events to keep members and their families engaged throughout the Pandemic.
- Served as food distribution center for members and other Bridgeport families providing over 10,000 meals.
- Delivered "Wakeman in a Bag" to members that provided each with resources, such as pencils, paper, healthy snacks, and various game supplies.
- Provided over 500 handmade masks to members and their families that were unable to leave their homes safely.
- Acted as a regular COVID-19 testing site to provide FREE testing to the community in partnership with Southwest Community Health Center.
- Opened licensed summer camp serving 150 campers/week in both Bridgeport & Fairfield that provided a safe environment for kids to be kids during these difficult times.
- Provided remote learning support on-site for 120 kids daily during the school year for children grades K-8.
- Provided Before & After school programming on-site for an average of 250 kids daily so that working parents have a safe learning environment for their kids.

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.

Wakeman Boys & Girls Club believes that receiving a solid education is a necessity to be both successful and fulfilled in life. The Club's Out of School programs provide our community's youth with the opportunity to participate in impactful educational and enrichment programs that support long-term academic success, including successful high school graduation with a plan for college and career.

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 provide these critical out of school time services. Please consider supporting Neighborhood Youth Center funding and let us continue in this work together providing "Great Futures" for the children who need us most in Connecticut.