



Mr. Chairman and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is JR Kenny, and I am the Director of Government Relations for Boys & Girls Clubs of America and represent the Rhode Island Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, which includes 24 Club sites across our state that serve over 24,000 young people each year. I am writing today in strong support of House Bill 5976.

This bill would provide four million dollars (\$4,000,000) to expand and strengthen afterschool, school vacation, summer learning, and workforce development programs for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12). It would also fund much-needed professional development for staff who work directly with young people.

This investment is critical because every day in Rhode Island, more than 27,000 kids leave school with nowhere to go. Without access to safe, supportive, and engaging environments, these children are at risk of being unsupervised and vulnerable to negative influences. At the Boys & Girls Clubs, we fill this gap by providing positive spaces where young people build relationships, develop skills, and engage in programs that foster their academic, social, and emotional growth.

I've seen firsthand the difference these programs make. Take Rozaria D., our 2024 Rhode Island Youth of the Year. Rozaria's journey is a testament to what happens when a young person has access to a high-quality afterschool program. Through her Club experience, she developed leadership skills, found her voice, and committed herself to giving back to her community. Stories like Rozaria's are made possible by investments in out-of-school time programs.

Yet, the need remains great. Clubs across Rhode Island served over 194,000 free meals and snacks last year, and 44% of our members qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch — demonstrating the socioeconomic barriers so many of our youth face. Additionally, staffing remains one of our biggest challenges. Increased funding for professional development will allow us to better equip our team to meet the evolving needs of today's youth and improve staff retention.

The return on investment is undeniable. Every dollar invested in Rhode Island's Boys & Girls Clubs returns \$9.60 in current and future earnings and cost-savings to our communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass House Bill 5976 to ensure that more Rhode Island students have access to high-quality learning opportunities year-round. This is an investment in our children, our communities, and our state's future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

JR Kenny
Director, Government Relations
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Rhode Island Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs