



April 27, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney  
Chairperson House Finance Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H-7501, Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Act - Support

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Finance Committee,

The Rhode Island Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of House Bill 7501, *the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Act*.

For Boys & Girls Clubs, the BOOST Act would build on the work already happening every day inside our Clubhouses. Clubs are often the first-place young people turn when they are feeling overwhelmed, isolated, or unsure where to seek help. HB7501 would provide Clubs with the resources to better equip staff with mental-health-informed training, strengthen mentoring and peer support, and integrate social-emotional learning and wellness activities into regular programming. These supports allow Clubs to respond earlier, more consistently, and in ways that are grounded in trusted relationships, helping young people build resilience before challenges reach a crisis point. HB7501 recognizes the essential role these out-of-school (OST) programs play and makes a targeted investment to strengthen them.

Across Rhode Island, Boys & Girls Clubs operate 27 Club sites, serving children and teens in urban, suburban, and rural communities. In 2024 alone, Clubs served more than 31,000 young people, with an average daily attendance of over 2,000 youth during the school year and summer months. The families we serve reflect the realities facing many Rhode Island communities:

- 31 percent of Club members come from single-parent households
- 43 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- Thousands of families rely on Clubs for daily meals, academic support, safe supervision, and positive youth-adult relationships outside the school day

These programs are essential community infrastructure for working families and for youth who need consistent, supportive environments. The BOOST Act addresses a clear gap by providing

\$100,000 in out-of-school time funding to support prevention-focused, community-based mental health initiatives, such as:

- Youth Mental Health First Aid training
- Peer support groups and mentoring programs
- Youth-led mental health initiatives
- Social-emotional learning materials and curricula
- Wellness projects, workshops, and creative programming
- Community-informed approaches that promote connection and early access to care

This small but strategic investment strengthens an existing statewide network of youth-serving organizations already supporting thousands of young people each year. By investing in prevention, relationships, and community-based supports, HB7501 helps reduce pressure on crisis systems while meeting youth where they are.

HB7501 is a thoughtful, forward-looking policy that reflects both the urgency of the youth mental health crisis and the proven effectiveness of OST programs. By creating a focused investment in trusted community settings, the BOOST Act ensures Rhode Island's young people have access to the relationships and resources they need to thrive.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs strongly supports HB7501 and urges the Committee to recommend its passage. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the General Assembly to strengthen youth mental health, support working families, and expand opportunity for all Rhode Island children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.R. Kenny". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

J.R. Kenny  
Director, Government Relations  
Boys & Girls Clubs of America  
Rhode Island Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs