



**NEW YORK STATE ALLIANCE
OF BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS, INC**

Testimony presented by the
New York State Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, Inc.

to the
Senate Finance Committee
and the Assembly Ways & Means Committee

Human Services FY 2025 Executive Budget

January 30, 2024

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger and Weinstein as well as Children & Families Chairpersons Brisport and Hevesi. My name is Justin Reuter and I am the CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Capital Area. I am testifying today on behalf of the New York State Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs to speak to you about the important role after-school providers play in communities across the state ensuring kids feel safe, valued, and respected. Thank you for this tremendous opportunity.

The NYS Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs represents 118 club sites across New York State serving over 92,000 youth annually. Our Club locations range from Southampton on Long Island to Ogdensburg in the North County and Niagara Falls in Western New York. In addition to serving school-age youth in urban, suburban and rural communities, Boys & Girls Clubs also support the unique circumstances of youth on military installations and provide culturally relative programs for youth in native communities. Clubs are a vital part of many communities reflect their communities in which they live:

- 75% of club kids identify as a minority race or ethnicity
- 60% are 12 years of age or younger, 40% are teens, aged 13-19
- 76% qualify for free and reduced price lunch
- 49% live in single parent households

Everyday over 580,000 kids in New York leave school with nowhere to go. They risk being unsupervised, unguided and unsafe. Kids today face many challenges including gang and gun violence, substance use and abuse, and many other unhealthy behaviors. Ensuring that they have a safe place to go after school, where they feel safe and supported, is critical to the future of our young people.

For more than 160 years, Boys & Girls Clubs have fostered hope and opportunity by cultivating the potential in every young person. Clubs offer homework help, career readiness and programs such as arts, sports and financial literacy – all in safe and nurturing environments. Everything offered at the Club has an educational component, which helps children and youth at school, build character and leadership skills, and engage in healthy behaviors.

Historically, there have been two major funding streams in New York State for after-school: the Advantage After School Program and Empire State After School Program. Individual Boys & Girls Clubs across the state have applied for and successfully received grants from one or both of these programs to support their role as after-school providers. Originating at different times and for slightly different purposes, the two programs have different metrics, parameters, oversight, and reimbursement methods and amounts. These inconsistencies were frustrating, time-consuming and created extra administrative burdens.

The proposal included in the Executive Budget to consolidate the two programs, at face value, is welcomed and applauded. We believe this will streamline processes, create efficiencies, and allow more time and effort to be spent providing services to kids. In addition, this will align advocacy efforts to allow providers to advocate for additional funding for one unified program, instead of pitting one against the other.

Clubs were told that all current Advantage and Empire contracts will expire August 31, 2024. We will await more information from the Executive, the Division of the Budget and the Office of Children and Families Services but are hopeful that this will result in continued contracts with existing providers who are operating successfully, and allow new providers and/or additional slots to come online.

Should additional funding become available, we encourage the legislature to include more funds to this program, as the need for after-school outweighs available services. In addition, after-school is a smart investment, as the Boys and Girls Club of America reported every dollar invested in Boys & Girls Clubs returns \$9.60 in current and future earnings and cost-savings to their communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.