



Written Testimony of  
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Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee  
**Childhood Obesity: The Declining Health of America's Next Generation, Part II**  
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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Dodd, Ranking Member Alexander and Members of the Subcommittee, good afternoon. My name is Philip J. Dwyer, President/CEO of the Central Connecticut Coast YMCA. I led my first fitness class as a YMCA youth volunteer and for the past 39 years I have been a YMCA professional. Today I'm honored to speak on behalf of my local YMCA, but also as a representative of the more than 2,600 YMCAs across the country who for nearly 160 years have been dedicated to the health of youth and families in America. All are welcome at their neighborhood YMCA, regardless of age, race, sex, faith, background, ability or income. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share some practical solutions to the obesity epidemic among youth. While my focus is on efforts of the YMCA and our many community-based partnerships, there are many government entities, foundations, and private institutions dedicated to reversing our current youth obesity trends and today we are seeking leadership from the federal government.

## **II. Nationally: OVERVIEW OF AMERICA'S 2686 YMCAs**

America's 2,686 YMCAs, at more than 10,000 sites, serve 21 million people each year – more than half of which are children. From cities to small towns YMCAs serve nearly 10 million children by building healthy spirit, mind and body for all. We believe that the lifestyle health crisis -- including childhood obesity is a defining issue of this next generation. Few organizations are in a better position than the YMCA to support change in children and their families. We have the knowledge, expertise, network and reach to succeed. At my local YMCA in Central Connecticut we serve 71,000 people each year and 40,000 children and youth.

### **How YMCAs Serve Children**

*The YMCA movement believes that all of our support to children and youth must be based on three foundational pillars: 1) All children must have access to healthy eating; 2) All children must engage in physical activity – preferably 60 minutes each day; and 3) All children must have strong relationships that support them in their pursuit of a healthy life.* It is on these three pillars -- and a fundamental belief that children are exposed to healthy living in a developmentally appropriate manner that emphasizes fun and play – letting kids be kids – that we base our myriad of programs and other opportunities.

- **Children:** YMCAs serve nearly 10 million children age 17 and under through a variety of activities all of which focus on building healthy spirit, mind and body for all. Nationally, 32 million children live within 3 miles of a YMCA. Almost 70 million households are within 3 miles of a YMCA. In Connecticut, my YMCA serves 40,000 children and youth which is one out of every six children in our service area.
- **Serving Children and Youth:** Programs focused specifically on children and youth who are being challenged with overweight issues at YMCAs grew by almost 50 percent during 2005 and 2006, and programs for overweight adults jumped almost 70 percent. Nutrition programs increased almost 30 percent, and weight management programs increased 165 percent. Broader community health and well-being coalitions grew 30 percent.
- **Camps:** YMCAs are the largest provider of camps in the United States.

- **Child Care:** YMCAs are the nation's largest non-profit provider of child care, with nearly 10,000 child care sites across the country.
- **Youth Sports:** YMCAs are the nation's largest non-profit provider of youth sports.
- **Collaborations with Schools:** Most YMCAs collaborate with their local schools to improve physical activity and nutrition for children and provide afterschool child care. In 2006, YMCAs collaborated with 1,746 elementary schools, 1,363 high schools, 1,379 middle schools, 966 colleges, 866 home school programs and 447 charter schools.
- **All YMCA programs are offered to and accessible to all, regardless of ability to pay.** YMCAs work hard day in and day out to ensure no child is left out due to the families' inability to pay.

### **YMCA's Answer to the Health Crisis: "Activate America"**

Activate America is the YMCA's response to our nation's growing health crisis. With Activate America, the YMCA is redefining itself and engaging communities across the country to provide better opportunities for people of all ages in their pursuit of health and well-being in spirit, mind and body. YMCAs are changing the way they work inside their facilities to make them more supportive for people who need help adopting and maintaining a healthier lifestyle, and they are moving outside of their facilities to act as a catalyst to improve community health. YMCA Healthy Kids Day is the nation's largest event designed to support the healthy living for kids and families.

For the last few years, the YMCA has incorporated the vision reflected in Activate America into more and more aspects of our work. For example, we're transforming YMCA child care sites into environments where our three pillars of success -- (1) physical activity, (2) healthy eating and (3) relationship building -- are the norm. As you will see later, these three pillars of our evidence-based methods are integral to what we are doing in Connecticut as well as what we are doing in YMCAs across the nation.

### **Academic Partners**

To ensure that the YMCA's work is grounded in the latest science, YMCA of the USA has worked with academic partners on Activate America. Harvard University School of Public

Health has helped YMCA of the USA better understand how to design assessment tools for measuring healthy eating and physical activity across all YMCA sites and programs. Stanford University School of Medicine's Prevention Research Center has provided expertise on several important projects, including two assessments – one that allows communities to assess how supportive their environments are for healthy living and one that allows individuals to assess their own lifestyle behaviors and risk factors. These and other academic partnerships will allow YMCAs to spread evidence-based best practices nationwide.

### **Community Collaboration**

Some of the greatest lessons in successfully addressing childhood obesity have come from our community based partnerships. At the YMCA, there are three programs that have the same goals and similar strategies funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- we like to refer to them as our “Healthy Communities” initiatives – Pioneering Healthier Communities, Steps to a Healthier US and ACHIEVE – all focus on collaborative engagement with community leaders, how environments influence health and well-being, and the role public policy plays in sustaining change. A total of 116 communities across the nation participate in these initiatives and 20 new communities will be launched later this month.

Our signature program, Pioneering Healthier Communities, or PHC for short, is led by our National Chairman, Senator Tom Harkin, a member of this committee. Through Pioneering Healthier Communities, YMCAs in 64 selected communities across the country have convened teams represented by key community stakeholders (including hospitals, public health departments, schools, local businesses, public officials and foundations) to develop strategies, including policy and environmental change approaches, that reduce barriers and increase support for healthy living in local communities. 20 new PHC communities will be launched this year. I will explore some of our success on this in Connecticut and then describe other successes nationwide.

### **III. HOW THE CENTRAL CONNECTICUT COAST YMCA WORKS LOCALLY ON THIS ISSUE**

#### **More than eating less and exercising more**

The YMCA has learned that the majority of kids and families need support in achieving their health and well-being goals. We call these individuals "**health seekers**" – they want to improve, but making everyday healthy choices to be healthy and live well is frequently a struggle, even when it has obvious advantages. Health Seekers, whether children or adult are different from the "**already active**" -- those who have and will stay active. Convincing Health Seekers to adopt healthier lifestyles, even when it has obvious advantages, is often difficult. Changing lifestyles of youth and families requires a lengthy period, sometimes many years, from the time new ideas are first presented to the time they are widely adopted.

For the "health seekers," this journey to better health is strengthened when they have supportive relationships and environments that allow them to make more consistent healthy choices. This is what the YMCA does everyday – provides the knowledge and supports that encourage healthy living by allowing kids and families to find the joy in living healthy lives through the support of family, friends, and the community at large. More kids and families need these supports. This epidemic of youth obesity will only be addressed by teaching and persuading youth that increased physical activity and improved nutrition is in their best interest. Helping them make this decision and then implementing it over a lifetime and confirming the benefits of this changed behavior. And this journey will only happen through relationship building.

Therefore, the key question for this committee, our society and especially for those of us committed to tackling the youth obesity issue: **How do we provide more supports and healthier environments to speed up the rate in which youth and families begin to make everyday healthy choices and begin living healthier lives?**

From our work in Connecticut, I can tell you that the solution is more than just telling kids to eat less and exercise more. Yes, people are responsible for their own behavior but too often society creates barriers, or at the least does not provide enough support, to help kids and

families realize their health goals. So, at our YMCA we sought out community partners and created the *Central Connecticut Coast Pioneering Healthy Communities Team* and together we have agreed to lead our communities' journey to wellness by changing the behaviors and environment impacting active lifestyles and healthy nutrition. We set three goals:

**The Food Systems Vision:** The Central Connecticut Coast (CCC) PHC Team works with partners to empower children and people who care about children within our service area to adopt healthier eating habits and improved nutrition, through nutrition education and access to wholesome foods.

**The Built Environment Vision:** The CCC PHC works with the Connecticut Governor's office and other regional partners to increase physical activity among youth, families and adults through increased use of the outdoors including: local, regional and state park systems, YMCA facilities, and school physical education programs to insure people engage in the recommended amount on a daily basis.

**The Live, Work, Play Vision:** The CCC PHC Team works with local community agencies to advocate for *equitable* policies and resources to improve *access* related to both nutrition education and opportunities for physical activity among children and their families. We need to remember there are many in our communities for whom healthy living may not even be a choice. Whether it be "food deserts" (lack of access to healthy food options), unsafe neighborhoods (where physical activity may not be an option), or decreased "walkability" (where zoning laws and the built environment discourage rather than encourage physical activity), the YMCA insists we must also address these barriers. Furthermore, research shows there is a correlation between lower income and increased risk of obesity. **Being that 1,518 YMCAs serve communities where the median family income is below the US average, we know we have a unique opportunity, and responsibility, to address these environmental barriers that cause health disparities.**

So, what have we done by becoming involved in Activate America through our Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative, with help from CDC Funding and our own resources? We gathered together a team of individuals interested in this issue from a local hospital, the New Haven-based Family Health Alliance, officials from the Fairfield and Milford Health

Departments, a state representative, local YMCA volunteers and started to talk about the issue and seek practical solutions. All of our programs help youth go through the cycle of adapting behaviors – teach, persuade, decide, implement and confirm. Let me describe some of them:

**>>First is to Teach**

- **Milford PHC Team:** Immediately following participation in the YMCA of the USA’s Washington, DC, PHC Conference, Dr. Dennis McBride, Director of Public Health for the City of Milford, recommended that the Mayor form a new committee comprised of community leaders to “identify practical and sustainable solutions and tools for healthier living within the City of Milford.” The PHC initiative through education, information, tools, resources, and access to best practices has given them a belief that their small efforts will grow as the combined PHC Team identifies best practices for adoption and potential funding sources for program expansion. The idea of advocating with the Milford Oyster Festival to include healthy food options came from these PHC Team discussions. To date the Milford PHC Team has initiated a Walking School Bus program at one elementary school and established a “Friday is Fruit Day” at three elementary schools. Their goal is to expand both programs.
- **Friday is Fruit Day in Milford** – In partnership with the Milford board of Health and the public school system we are insuring fruit is available every Friday. Our goal is to provide an environment that encourages healthy eating.
- **Walking School Bus** – In partnership with the Milford Board of Health and local elementary schools we have created one Walking School Bus system and are working on a second, in which parent volunteers “pick up” children along a route and provide a safe and secure pathway to school...while encouraging increased physical activity for children.

**>> Second is to Persuade: Healthier Lifestyles is in their best interest and compatible with their values**

- **Parks & Recreation – CAS, YMCA alliance** – The Connecticut State Alliance of YMCAs gathered the leadership of the Parks and Recreation Associations and the

Connecticut Alliance of Schools to discuss how they can work together. One innovative idea being discussed is to allow youth to get school credit for participating in physical education activities in community agency based settings. The school day has focused on academic-only classes to improve test scores – forcing physical education and arts out of the curriculum in many schools. That trend will continue and so schools should be given incentives to meet national standards of physical education and should be encouraged to allow those standards to be met through community-based settings like the YMCA and local parks.

- **Healthy Family Home Starter Kits** will be distributed in the 2008 – 2009 school year to middle schools in Bridgeport among 6<sup>th</sup> graders to help families support their child’s need for increased activity and improved nutrition. The YMCA’s Healthy Family Home is a **new program developed from a partnership between YMCA of the USA and Eli Lilly and Company, to leverage two of the most powerful forces in health today – the family home and the proven impact of small, sustained changes.** The starter kit provides families with guidelines and suggested activities in the following areas, known to reduce the onset of chronic diseases in later years:
  - How to insure moderate, fun activity at least a total of sixty minutes a day
  - How to engage in vigorous, fun physical activity three days a week with a goal of twenty minutes each day
  - Coaching families to serve fruits and vegetables at every snack and meal
  - Coaching families to sit down as a family for one meal a day
  - How to involve youth in snack and meal preparation and clean up every day
  - Making water the primary drink option
  - How to include a whole grain or protein option with every snack
  - Provide healthy “unsaturated” fat foods at meals and snacks
  - Emphasis on moderation, balance and variety in meal choices

**>> Third is to *Decide*: Help individuals and families adopt a healthier lifestyle**

- **Teen Projects, New Haven** – Forty agencies in New Haven have formed a Youth Collaborative to coordinate programs and share resources. The YMCA is part of this

group's leadership so we asked a group of youth from these agencies to prepare application packages, invite youth from the forty agency collaborative to apply for a mini-grant, evaluate the submitted proposals and chose four activities presented by the:

- Family Learning Center will operate a Healthy Hearts Club that will engage youth ages 5 – 14 in physical activities such as dance, yoga and Tae Kwon Do. Youth will be encouraged to exercise more every week, create healthy recipes and invent group games that can be taught to other kids on how to stay and play healthy all the time.
- Casa Latina, Youth as Leaders Program will initiate an activity this fall called Mission Nutrition. A youth cooking club will teach children how to prepare and cook easy, healthy meals for both themselves and their families that are low cost, nutritious and tasty. A cookbook of healthy meals will be distributed to families engaged in the program and to other youth agencies in New Haven.
- The Consultation Center will engage thirty youth from the Hill neighborhood to inspire them to be healthier by engaging in physical activities and advising them on healthy snacks.
- Solar Youth, Inc. have engaged ten youth from the Westville Public Housing project to introduce them to health issues through a community service learning model program that discusses health topics such as exercise, nutrition, hunger and mental health.

Each of these mini-grants have been designed to help youth groups address the issues of increasing physical activity and improving nutrition among teens in New Haven. Youth create the project, they apply to a youth led foundation board who award the mini-grants and then the youth implement the program. We believe that peer to peer teaching will be more persuasive and lead to a longer term commitment to healthy lifestyle changes.

- **Teen Projects, Bridgeport** – We implemented a similar program in Bridgeport.. Working with our partner, Work and Learn, a not-for-profit associated with the local Council of Churches, we recruited a group of 25 middle school aged youth, considered at risk and living in the east side and east end of Bridgeport, to prepare application packages, invite eleven elementary schools serving their neighborhoods to apply for a mini-grant and evaluate the proposals. They chose the programs presented by Beardsley

and Barnum schools. Barnum School youth will create a community garden and will combine this activity with classroom education about the value of nutritional fruits and vegetables that can be grown in their garden. The Beardsley School fifth grade class will engage in an assessment process, calculating their BMI and nutritional habits as well as evaluating their fitness level. This information will be used to create a personal intervention program that will include bi-monthly visits from a personal trainer and monthly classroom visits by a nutritionist. Students will keep journals recording physical activity and eating habits throughout the school year. A year end celebration, organized by youth engaged in the Work and Learn program will take place during a “mini Olympics” program featuring physical activity, healthy foods and awards to all students. The goal is to foster a life long commitment to a healthy lifestyle that students will then share with their families and their east end community.

**>> Fourth is to help youth and families implement a change of lifestyle through incentives**

- **No Child Left Inside:** More than any other generation today’s kids spend a great deal of time indoors. The No Child Left Inside initiative sponsored by Gov. M. Jodi Rell’s office is a promise and a pledge to help Connecticut’s children live active, healthier lives. This special outreach and education awareness campaign was created to encourage families to enjoy all the recreational resources and outdoor activities offered by Connecticut’s state parks, forests and waterways. The state has provided transportation, funded by a corporate grant insuring inner city families could participate. The Fairfield and Bridgeport YMCAs have participated in NCLI events by organizing urban families to take advantage of this initiative..
- **Urban Fishing Program:** The Fairfield and Bridgeport YMCAs are collaborating with the CT Department of Environmental Protection by teaching the Connecticut Aquatic Resource Education (“CARE”) program. We are in our second year. This summer, sixty campers and twenty-five youth from Work and Learn will be taught about their coastal environment.. Everyone gets outside, exercises and enjoys our natural resources while learning the technical aspects of fishing and also learning to respect the environment.

Too often physical activity is focused on sports activities, leaving out many youth who need to develop habits of physical activity that can last a lifetime, such as fishing.

- **Free Swim Lessons at State Parks:** Over 700 families are participating in this program which is operated by CT YMCAs as part of Governor M. Jodi Rell No Child Left Inside initiative. Families receive a free pass to a state park and are encouraged to use it for the day to explore the trails and natural resources of the park. YMCAs provide free swim lessons, funded from a grant by CT DEP, so that enjoyment of the aquatic resources can be done safely while everyone gets exercise.
- **Milford Walking Trails:** Milford had already identified their 12 “best” walking trails. Through the leadership of the Milford PHC effort, and inviting leaders of that effort to the PHC team meetings; this project is being given more attention.
- **Fairfield Walking Trails** – In partnership with the Fairfield Board of Health and the local conservation commission that has purchased and manages open space, we are going to improve the trail system within town owned land to create an environment that encourages physical activity. The simple process of creating better signage, better publicity and creating a point system where children, and their families earn points every time they spend a weekend on a walking trail, encourages better use of this available resource. The first, of what is hoped will be 15 walking trails have been identified and a brochure describing how to access the trail was produced.

**>> Fifth is to promote consistent action so youth and families can confirm benefits of the changed behavior**

- **HEALTHY KIDS DAY:** About 1000 youth participated from the CCC PHC service area with the theme of “Passport to Fitness.” Each participant at all YMCA’s received a passport which incorporated stations around the Y that engaged youth adults and families in physical tasks as well as answering quires focusing on health and fitness. The stations were manned by YMCA staff and an assortment of community wellness volunteers; dentists, doctors nurses, nutritionist, massage therapist; all joined the YMCA in teaching participants how they could achieve an active healthy lifestyle in their community with support from the YMCA and community health and wellness professionals.

- **America On the Move Week (“AOM”)**: Eleven branches of the CCC YMCA participated in AOM week with millions of steps taken towards more active and healthy lives. Mayors and Selectmen started the week with community walks and a healthy luncheon .The Bridgeport YMCA hosted a Salsa Smart Spot Dance party at Seaside Park. YMCA’s Implemented a holistic approach focusing on educating the community about healthy eating and increasing activity, local doctors, wellness centers, clinics and naturopathic doctors participated; AOM week launched a year long program of continuous workshops and free screenings given by YMCA staff and health care professionals addressing disease prevention such as diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, heart disease, weight management and smoking cessation.
- **Remove soda machines and serve healthy snacks at meetings** – Something as simple as removing soda and unhealthy snacks from vending machines can make a difference. You will hear that “we can’t lose the money” from these sales. In fact our commissions from vending machines has remained the same, and in some cases grown, after a period of time when youth adjusted to the new products and found them just as good.

The Central Connecticut Coast PHC team realizes this process needs to be sustainable, and we are committed for the long haul.

#### **IV. EXAMPLES OF YMCA ACADEMIC and COMMUNITY WORK** **AROUND THE COUNTRY**

##### **Harvard Research to help guide YMCA Child Care and 2009 USDA Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization**

From an academic standpoint, through our partnership with Harvard University School of Public Health, YMCAs participated in an organizational change intervention study to achieve new environmental standards. We evaluated interventions in our afterschool child care settings at pilot YMCAs. Through this study, we not only established "Environmental Standards for Healthy Eating guidelines" to share with YMCAs nationwide, but we also have now submitted recommendations for the 2009 Reauthorization of USDA Child Nutrition Programs based upon

this research. We look forward to working with Members of this Committee and others to ensure that this research can be utilized when Congress addresses this issue next year.

### **Community Based Models Nationwide**

Communities participating in Pioneering Healthier Communities across the nation have had success in a number of areas including: influencing community walkability and pedestrian safety, access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and physical education requirements in schools. Specific examples include:

#### **Nutrition:**

- A program at five **Pittsburgh-area YMCAs** makes high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables available to community members to purchase at lower-than-market prices. This is in an urban area with limited access to healthy foods. Response to this program has been overwhelming.
- In the **Quad Cities –an area that overlaps between Illinois and Iowa** – the community team was able to influence a grocery store chain to remodel the floor plans of their new stores to include teaching kitchens to help residents learn how to make healthy meals.

#### **Built Environment**

- In **Attleboro, Massachusetts** they were able to get the right partners to the table to collaborate on the creation of an extensive city-wide trail system that would also connect to adjacent communities allowing commuters an opportunity to engage in physical activity and families an area for activity.
- The team in **Rapid City, South Dakota** was able to influence local leaders to require that new developments being built have sidewalks. They were also able to get “count-down” walking signals installed at crosswalks.

## **Where we Live, Work, Learn and Play**

- **The Pittsburgh** team worked with a large medical center to change organizational policies to provide more time for staff to engage in physical activity and for meetings to include healthy foods.
- **Clearwater, Florida** was able to restoring physical education in schools and requiring licensed child care sites to require 30 minutes of daily physical activity by working with policymakers.
- **In Pittsburgh**, the Afterschool with Activate Pittsburgh Program – or ASAP – serves about 6,500 low-income kids. As a result of the program: 76 percent increased muscular strength, 56 increased muscular endurance, and 69 percent increased their flexibility.
- The Healthy U Program in **Grand Rapids, MI**, which serves about 3,400 low-income kids. Has resulted in a dramatic decrease in blood pressure and an increase in strength and flexibility. More than 90 percent of the participating kids improved school attendance, completed homework and chose not to smoke, drink or use drugs.

As you can see there are a good mix of programs, policies and environmental changes represented here. All of these things need to work together in a community. We know that the programs can change behavior, but you need the policies and environmental changes to make those behaviors stick.

#### **IV. SUMMARY AND CALL TO ACTION**

##### **An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure**

Our grandmothers and mothers are correct; an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Unfortunately our spending priorities in this country don't match up to this fact. For every \$1.00 spent on curing a problem, only a nickel is spent on prevention. Further we now know, thanks to the Trust for America's Health's recent study, there is a proven Return on Investment (ROI) for every dollar spent on prevention due to a savings in medical costs. Youth obesity caused by inactivity and poor nutrition is a very preventable condition. Prevention based solutions have a slow rate of adoption because individuals have difficulty in perceiving their relative advantage. But we can increase the rate of adoption with the correct incentives and the support of healthy relationships. With that support, people will make everyday healthy choices that are compatible with their existing values we can increase the rate of adoption.

##### **What should you do, where is the priority? It begins with funding.**

- We support **\$30 million for the Community Health/Steps program at the CDC,** including \$5 million for the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative which will help community based organizations like the YMCA in their efforts to address this crisis.
- We support expanded eligibility and funding for federal nutrition programs, and look forward to working with Senator Harkin when the **2009 USDA Reauthorization of Child Nutrition** legislation comes up next Congress.
- We support protecting the \$1.1 billion in funding for the **21st Century Community Learning Centers in the US Department of Education Budget;** and thank Senator Dodd for his incredible leadership in this regard. Nationwide, more than 200 YMCAs receive the US Department of Education's 21st. C.C.L.C. funding. As the largest source of afterschool funding in the Federal Government, this represents a key area in which this Committee and others can bring to bear proven solutions in addressing childhood obesity. Our YMCA in Connecticut operates programs in elementary schools and two local high schools through this funding stream. We support the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning

Centers Act of 2007, sponsored by Senator Dodd, which would include the provision of physical fitness and wellness programs as allowable activities under 21<sup>st</sup> C.C.L.C.

- We support a minimum of \$75million in funding for the **Carol White Physical Education for Progress (PEP) Grants** administered by the US Department of Education. PEP grants are the only federal funding for physical education in schools.
- As for legislation, we support the following proposals introduced by Senator Harkin: (1) **The Play Every Day Act (S.651)** -- to ensure that children and youth achieve the national recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity every day; (2) **The "Fit Kids Act" (S. 2173)** -- to expand physical education and physical activity for all public school children through grade 12 before, during and after school.

#### **Two Legislative Ideas worth exploring (Connecticut local concepts)**

- **Tax Credits for Urban Environments** - Low income housing tax credits have proven effective in encouraging private investment in solving the country's housing crisis. Why not create a tax credit to encourage investment and development in urban environments to insure youth and families have access to safe places and programs aimed at increasing physical activity, improving nutrition and creating the type of relationships needed among families to change lifestyle behavior and sustain that changed behavior over time.
- **School Credit for Physical Education in non-school hours** - Another innovative idea we are working on is to allow youth to get school credit for participating in physical education activities in community agency based settings during non-school hours. We know that a small percentage of schools provide daily physical education or its equivalent. This decline of physical activity programs has many causes, including parents and school boards desire to increase the academic requirements to improve standardized test scores. We should acknowledge that the desire to focus on academics will continue and the hours available to teachers to accomplish those goals will not change. Thus, why not give schools incentives to meet national standards of physical education, but allow those standards to be met through participating in physical activity and nutrition programs in community based settings like the YMCA.

## **V. CONCLUSION: THE YMCA AND AMERICA**

I don't believe that the YMCA can single handedly improve health in America – we need governmental, foundation and private support --but I don't think health in America can be improved without the YMCA. Our charitable mission calls us to support the healthy development of children and youth and to help find ways to combat the lifestyle health crisis that our children face. We have a history of working through partnerships that allow us to bring our collective resources to bear on major social issues. After all, don't forget innovation is in our DNA, over our 160 years, at the YMCA, we invented basketball, racquetball, indoor swimming lessons, we were among the first to serve soldiers on the battlefield and introduced youth outreach workers in the 1960's and countless other solutions to community need. We hope to match this innovation with our passion and reach to address the current crisis in childhood obesity. Across the nation in YMCAs, neighborhoods, schools, in small towns and big cities, and in the halls of state and federal government we are actively engaged and commit to continue to be part of the solution to the childhood obesity crisis.

Thank you to the Senator Dodd and Senator Alexander and the other Members of the committee for inviting me to this hearing and allowing me to share my thoughts on this important issue.