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## **Testimony before the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee**

### **In SUPPORT of Senate Bill 180- Education- Robotics Grant Program- Alterations**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 180- Education- Robotics Grant Program- Alterations. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

A key focus area of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (Kirwan Commission) is increasing student access to high-quality College and Career Readiness Pathways. As the Kirwan Commission finalizes its funding recommendations, SB 180 offers the opportunity to expand access to a proven College and Career Readiness pathway, Out of School Time (OST) robotics programs.

Participation in robotics clubs have the potential to encourage literacy and confidence in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) for young participants and have been correlated with increased academic skills in scientific research, engineering, technological literacy, and problem solving<sup>1</sup>. The international FIRST robotics program notes that in addition to academic gains, participation yields substantial increase in student interest and entry into STEM-related career fields<sup>2</sup>. **FIRST alumni are 2.6 times more likely to enroll in an engineering course in their freshman year of college and more than 75% of alumni are in a STEM field as a student or professional<sup>3</sup>.**

For students underrepresented in STEM careers (racial minorities, women, first generation college students, runaway and homeless youth, justice-involved youth, immigrants with limited English proficiency, and youth receiving special education services, amongst others), access to a robust robotics program could shift their academic and/or career trajectory.

SB 180 will increase the amount of state funding available for robotics programs and broaden eligibility criteria for this funding to include nonprofit and community organizations, in addition to public schools. **We urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 180 to ensure more equitable access to robotics programs and the many benefits participation has been shown to yield.**

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<sup>1</sup>Ebelt, Kaye R. "The Effects of a Robotics Program on Students' Skills in STEM, Problem Solving, and Teamwork". Montana State University. July 2012

<sup>2</sup>FIRSTInspires.org. Impact Infographic.

<sup>3</sup>ibid



