



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
VERMONT ALLIANCE

February 7, 2024

Dear Chair Wood, Chair Conlon and members of the House Committee on Human Services and the House Committee on Education

On behalf of the Vermont Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs and the more than 1,750 youth Clubs serve annually in Brattleboro, Burlington, Rutland and Vergennes we encourage the House Human Services Committee and the House Education Committee to support the creation of a Special Fund in the Budget Adjustment Bill. A Special Fund will allow grants to be distributed to public, nonprofit and community providers which would provide greater access for youth to participate in afterschool and summer programs across the state.

Due to a legal issue with the language in Act 78 of 2023, the Agency of Education is unable to grant to entities outside of local education agencies (LEAs). Without a technical fix – the creation of a Special Afterschool Fund - this funding will be withheld from its original intent of creating a mixed-delivery model of services for parents, families and communities.

When funding for out-of-school-time (OST) programming is only given directly to LEAs, with the expectation that they might subgrant to nonprofits or other partners, bureaucracy and other factors can impede the timely distribution of funds to experienced OST providers – like Boys & Girls Clubs. High quality learning recovery will always involve partnerships, but let OST experts access the necessary funds to do their part. There are three reasons why these funds should not be awarded only to LEAs:

1. Not all school districts have the capacity to implement their own OST program;
2. Not all school districts have the capacity to manage a subrecipient(s) or partner with a third-party OST program provider;
3. If the funding dedicated to OST programs becomes conflated with school budgets, it will be hard to determine what should be dedicated for OST programs and the implementation and outcomes of those programs.

The additional burden put on LEAs to create a program they do not have the capacity to implement because they are understaffed, lack the resources to implement or face other challenges severely limits the intent of creating an *Afterschool for All* program. Additionally, some LEAs would be interested in having OST programs in their communities, but by only granting to LEAs this puts additional strain on the resources that are currently available in school districts to administer grants, monitor subrecipients, and appropriately report outcomes of their programs.

An example of where a school district has recognized the benefit of allowing a partner to directly receive grant funding is in Rutland / Addison Counties. The Slate Valley Unified School District and Boys & Girls Club of Rutland County recognized a need in their community for youth services in 2021. Through conversations, two elementary schools were identified as locations for OST programs, Orwell and Castleton Elementary Schools. The Slate Valley Unified School District also recognized that because of a myriad of factors, managing a 21st CCLC grant and subrecipient would be more challenging than partnering directly with the BGC Rutland County. The FY23 21st CCLC grant award provided 5 years of funding to BGC Rutland County and they became the first non-profit organization to directly receive a 21st CCLC grant award from the Agency of Education. Because of the 21st CCLC funding, BGC Rutland County, in partnership with Slate Valley Unified School District, has been able to open two new OST program sites serving 80 youth at each location. If the BGC Rutland County did not apply and

receive the award, there would not have been an afterschool program created at Castleton and Orwell Elementary Schools.

The Budget Adjustment Act Special Fund is important because it allows nonprofit and community providers to be an essential part of the OST ecosystem. Afterschool and summer learning programs, such as Boys & Girls Clubs, are essential supports that enable students to reach their full potential and compliment the work of schools by reinforcing academic skills, providing enriching experiences and embedding students in a safe and healthy environment during the hours that school is out. Data from the Vermont Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs Youth Outcomes report shows that youth who attend Clubs have positive outcomes. Nearly 85% of Boys & Girls Club members reported getting mostly A's & B's in school last year and 93% of Club members expect to graduate high school.

Allowing nonprofit and community-based organizations access to the Special Fund and investing in existing afterschool and summer programs can provide cost savings because infrastructure, programs, and methodologies are already being implemented in other locations and are easily transferrable to new communities. Additionally, OST providers are already filling the gaps when it comes to hiring, staffing, and training staff to support OST providers. If an LEA is having to start this process from the very beginning, it will increase the cost of the program and decrease the resources allocated to youth.

Boys & Girls Clubs across Vermont provide a safe, affordable place for children and teens during the critical OST and summer. By creating a Special Fund to administer the grant funds, it would increase access for youth to participate in OST and summer programs across the state.

Sincerely,

Nicole Rice, Executive Director, Boys & Girls Club of Rutland County
Tanya Benosky, Executive Director, Boys & Girls Club of Burlington
Alicia Grangent, CEO, Boys & Girls Club of Vergennes
Scott Aronowitz, Executive Director, Boys & Girls Club of Brattleboro