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February 7, 2024

To: House and Human Services Committee
From: Susan Fortier, Executive Director – Meeting Waters YMCA
Re: Act 78 Afterschool Special Fund

Madam Chair and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

I am writing to request your support for the creation of the Afterschool Special Fund, to allow all afterschool and summer programs that meet the eligibility criteria to apply for and access the funds as intended by Act 78 - to support a mixed delivery system for afterschool and summer programming. Eligible recipients should include public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

Act 78 is a critical initiative that aims to achieve universal afterschool access through a mixed delivery model. As Executive Director of the Meeting Waters YMCA, a nonprofit organization founded in 1895, and having been in the field of out-of-school time programming for more than 25 years, I have witnessed the profound impact that out-of-school time programs can have, particularly on the lives of youth who may not otherwise have access to quality, enriching programs. I strongly believe in the importance of expanding and sustaining these programs.

Community-based out-of-school time programs like the YMCA meet a critical need of working families. While many school-based programs end before the work day is over (3 or 4PM), offer programming only during the school year, and may or may not offer transportation, the Y provides programming for children for 50 weeks per year – including full-day programs during school vacations and in-service days, and eight weeks in the summer. We meet the childcare needs of working families while providing enriching, asset-based programming.

I am particularly concerned about LEAs' capacity to review, award and administer grants, process payments, and ensure those grants are utilized in the way they are intended (including evaluation of programs). It would take a significant amount of the funding to provide the administration needed to do this, which would in turn reduce funds available to directly serve children. Setting up a grant administration and overview system within LEAs could also cause critical delays in getting resources to programs in time for Summer 2024. By creating the Afterschool Special Fund and allowing all programs to apply directly, instead of through their LEA, we can ensure that the maximum amount of funds go directly to supporting programming for children, as was intended.

Many afterschool and summer programs that serve LGBTQ+, BIPOC and other underserved/underrepresented youth - including the YMCA - are currently facing challenges due to limited funding. The Afterschool Special Fund would provide the necessary financial support to expand existing programs and create new afterschool and summer initiatives where capacity is currently limited. This support is crucial to ensure that more youth, especially in underserved areas, have access to quality afterschool and summer programs.

Organizations that provide out-of-school time programs, like the one I represent, require access to additional funds for expansion, development, and sustainability. With the support of the Afterschool Special Fund, we can

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address the gaps in capacity and establish programs in areas where there is little to no out-of-school time support. This will significantly broaden the reach of afterschool and summer programs, serve a diverse population as intended by Act 78, and positively impact the lives of countless youth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Susan Fortier
Executive Director
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