

Good afternoon. My name is Holly Morehouse, and I am the Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool. Thank you for holding this hearing.

I'd like to ask the committee to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million for Fiscal Year 2017. The ELO Special Fund was created last year, but no money has yet been allocated. An appropriation of \$2.5 million would help ensure that all high-needs communities in Vermont are able to provide access to quality Expanded Learning Opportunities for their children and youth.

As our state leaders we ask that you address many difficult issues: poverty, addiction, hunger, the academic achievement gap, the shrinking middle class. While access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs won't solve all our problems, research tells us that without adequately addressing what is happening with our children and youth outside the school day and over the summer, we won't be able to make meaningful progress on some of our most critical issues affecting Vermont kids and families.

Take for instance the persistent academic achievement gap in Vermont. Studies have shown that where our students fall behind is not in the classroom but outside the school day and over the summer. In fact, up to 2/3 of the academic achievement gap can be attributed to differences in summer learning opportunities.

Consider working families. Over 79% of Vermont children have all available parents in the work force. For working families there is often a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are working and children are out of school. This gap is even bigger during the summer months and school vacation weeks.

Consider addiction. We know that the afterschool hours of 3-6pm are the peak hours for children and youth to engage in risky behaviors, experiment with alcohol and drugs, and commit crimes or be victims of crime. Every dollar invested in afterschool and summer learning programs can save Vermont tax payers \$2.18 down the line.

How about access to food? In many schools, lunch is served at 11:30am or even earlier. The snacks and suppers provided during an afterschool program may be the only healthy food a child has access to until the next day. In summer, access to food is even more important, and summer food sites reach many more kids when they are an integral part of a summer learning program than when they are a stand-alone meal site.

The benefits of regular participation in afterschool and summer learning programs are many. Currently 22,000 children and youth in Vermont need access to programs. One of the biggest barriers in Vermont is program cost. While Vermont ranked 4th in the nation in 2014 for afterschool programming, in that same report we were 51st in the nation for the percentage of low-income children and youth participating in these programs (14% in VT compared to 45% nationally).

We know from research and from practice, that afterschool and summer learning programs are essential to the health, well-being and future success of all of our children and youth. I appreciate the legislature's focus on some of our toughest issues and hope that you will make the financial commitment to "zap the gap" by appropriating funds for the ELO Special Fund. Thank you.