

Hello! My name is Jolanta Labejsza. I live in Rochester, Vermont and I am the Site Director for Rochester Ex.C.E.L. Afterschool Program. Thank you so much to the Vermont House and Senate Appropriations Committees for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

I would like to ask that the legislature fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million for Fiscal Year 2017. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would ensure all high-need communities in Vermont could get the financial support they need to make sure that children, youth, and families have access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

Many families in my area want access to expanded learning opportunities—including school-based afterschool programs, summer learning programs and others but these same families and kids aren't able to do so mostly because of the cost. I work with some families in my area who struggle financially and sometimes they have to sign out their children from the afterschool program at some point during the year, deeply upsetting their children through this and also us, teachers, who can see how the program is good for them. Such a decision hurts the children who love attending our enrichment programs, get help with their homework, make friends and are in a safe place instead of too often having to go on a bus to an empty home.

Expanded learning opportunities are key for working families by providing a safe space where students can continue their learning while their parents are working. In addition, afterschool and summer programs are places to get healthy snacks and meals, participate in fun physical activities, and engage more deeply in STEM topics. We know that Vermont parents are on board—according to a national study in 2014, 88% of Vermont parents support public funding of afterschool.

I very much appreciate the legislature's support of education initiatives that happen in and out of school. I hope the Appropriations committees will make the financial commitment to support expanded learning opportunities for all kids in VT by allocating funds for the ELO Special Fund in FY17.

Thanks again, I am grateful for this opportunity.

