

Hello. My name is Sarah Willey and I live in St. Johnsbury, VT. 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 2018. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would ensure all high-need communities in Vermont, like St. Johnsbury, could get the financial support they need to make sure that children, youth, and families have access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

In the last ten years, I have worked with children in different capacities; from child care, to child welfare, and now in the public school system. Throughout my work, there has always been a clear and consistent need amongst all children: safety provided by adults who will support their development and inspire their learning.

As the Director of the Catamount Community (CatCH) Hours Afterschool Program I am able to provide St. Johnsbury's children with academic and enrichment learning opportunities; along with recreation, and socialization; in a safe environment led by kind and inspirational adults. All things that may not have been accessible to them without an inclusive afterschool program. In St. Johnsbury, the CatCH Afterschool Program has allowed students to become sportsmen as they practice archery; work as carpenters as they learn woodworking skills; experiment as engineers while putting together and programming robots; they have learned the importance of physical wellness through countless recreation, including swimming and rock climbing; and they become artists who are challenged to draw and create in new ways- making comic books with illustration and storylines, paper mache masterpieces, and seeing their community in a new light as they capture it in their sketchbooks.

Acquiring new skills ingrains a sense of self-worth and pride, allowing children to believe in themselves and their futures.

Afterschool and Summer learning opportunities provide families with safe places for their children to learn, develop and experience enrichment, with the guidance of supportive adults, that will provide them with options that they can carry on into the workforce as well as inspire them to be lifelong learners.

I hope the Appropriations committees will make the financial commitment to support Afterschool and Summer learning for all kids in VT by allocating funds to the ELO Special Fund in FY18. Governor Scott's proposal to promote more interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) via grants is in direct alignment with afterschool and summer learning programs and could be included in the ELO Special Fund.

Thank you again, I am grateful for this opportunity.

Sarah Willey