

My name is Virginia Burley. I have lived in East Montpelier since 1981.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit public testimony on this important topic.

I would like to ask that the Budget for Fiscal Year 2018 include an **appropriation of \$2.5 million** to the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would ensure that all high-need communities in Vermont could get the financial support they need to ensure that children, youth, and working families have access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs. The ELO Special Fund was created two years ago, and a proposal to put money into the fund missed narrowly in FY 16. This is a need whose time has come! I worked on two summer study groups under the pre-K-through-16 council that led to the creation of this initiative. I currently serve as the Chair of the Board of Vermont Afterschool, the statewide network for ELO. In addition, I founded and ran for 15 years Community Connections, the school-based afterschool and summer program that has served Montpelier and the surrounding (U-32) towns since 2001 and am keenly aware of how ELO programs help kids and families. My current work in substance abuse prevention gives me additional insight into how ELO programs build assets in youth and provide a safe space for families struggling with poverty, substance abuse and mental health issues.

Many Vermont families want access to expanded learning opportunities—including school-based afterschool programs, summer learning programs, YMCAs, vacation camps, and Boys & Girls Clubs—but these same families and kids aren't able to access programs because there aren't any in their towns, or costs are prohibitive, or there are waiting lists. Currently, there are 21,000 K-12 kids enrolled in afterschool and more than 22,000 more would participate in an

afterschool if one were available in their community. Rural communities are particularly underserved. Given the importance of these programs in closing the achievement gap and supporting working families, this lack of equity is troubling. The legislature has made poverty and economic opportunity priorities for this year. ELO directly addresses both. Indeed, the lack of dedicated state funding in Vermont contributes to Vermont having the lowest participation by low income children in the country.

Afterschool and summer learning programs are crucial 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 administration's support of education initiatives that happen in and out of school. I hope Governor Scott will make the financial commitment to support expanded learning opportunities for all K-12 kids in Vermont by allocating funds for the ELO Special Fund in FY18.

Sincerely,

Virginia Burley

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