

**Testimony for State of Vermont Budget Hearing (Rutland, VT)
Monday, February 12, 2018**

Hello, my name is Dean Williams. I am a retired Information Security Officer and I live in South Burlington. Thank you for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

I am testifying to ask the Appropriations Committee to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million dollars for fiscal year 2019. The legislature created the ELO Special Fund in 2015, 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.

Why is this important? Because without adequately addressing what is happening with our children and youth outside of the school day and over the summer, we won't be able to make meaningful progress on some of the most critical issues we face today.

For example, the academic achievement gap in Vermont. Studies have shown that where our children and youth fall behind is not in the classroom, but what they have access to over the summer. In fact, up to 2/3 of the academic achievement gap can be attributed to differences in summer learning opportunities.

Research shows that students who are consistently involved in extracurricular activities like afterschool programs are about 70 percent more likely to go to college than those who are not. Trends show a widening gap between families of means and low-income families when it comes to spending on, and participation in,

afterschool and summer learning activities in Vermont, with the lowest percentage in the nation of low-income children participating in afterschool programs, this opportunity gap exists here—and is in danger of getting wider.

Expanded Learning Opportunities help families by providing safe spaces where students can continue their learning while their parents are at work. Over 79% of Vermont children and youth have all available parents in the workforce. There is often a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are working and children and youth are out of school. This gap is even bigger during the summer months and school vacation weeks.

We know from research, and from practice, that afterschool and summer learning programs are essential to the well-being, health, and future success of Vermont's children and youth. An investment of \$2.5 million in the ELO Special Fund in FY19 is an investment in Vermont's children, youth, and families. Thank you for your consideration.

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