

Hi there. My name is Beth Chambers and I live in Newport, Vermont. 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 2019. 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.

I am the program director of the Encore After School and Summer Programs, which includes 12 towns in Orleans County. Over 1,100 students took advantage of these programs last year, and each year attendance increases. I would love to think that the increase is connected to our high-quality programs, but I know better. Orleans County is suffering serious economic hardship, as are many other rural areas of Vermont. In the Re-Newport Forums held by the Vermont Council on Rural Development and Vermont Community Foundation, local organizations, such as the Newport City After School Program, shared that they are at capacity. When you search for common elements of these resources, it is easy to see that they provide immediate needs for families. After school programs satisfy these immediate concerns. They relieve the stress of worrying about the safety of their children while parents are at work, because of low-to-no costs fee structures, parents can afford to use our programs as childcare, and whether or not they can afford groceries, children receive at least a snack, but in many cases, a meal after school hours.

Last year, after a string of arrests for heroin trafficking, our attendance at several sites grew. Children were able to be in a safe and familiar space while they finished their homework and ate dinner, before heading home to entirely new living situations. After school programs are there for kids providing them and their families the immediate needs that are upmost in their parent's minds.

On top of the immediate needs, our programs satisfy academic, physical, and emotional needs as well. Last year, 19% of our programs involved STEM, 9% literacy, 13% homework help and tutoring, 27% health and wellness including exercise and nutrition, 16% in the arts, and 4% community service and leadership opportunities. All were engaging and

hands-on opportunities that supported student choice and project-based learning.

*In Governor Scott's Budget Address, he spoke about creating the best Cradle-to-Career system in the nation, giving our kids the brightest possible future, and attracting more families to all areas of Vermont. One way to do this would be to focus on supporting education initiatives that benefit all Vermont kids, including those during the out-of-school time hours where youth can gain workforce development skills and engage in STEM learning.* Encore employs over 170 dedicated staff members, many of which are high school students receiving career training.

After school programs, such as the MedTrek program, which connects Newport City children to health careers at the local hospital, open children's eyes to local career opportunities. Local professionals, such as an auto mechanic, horse farmer, and refuge biologist, lead programs teaching real skills. Our programs have the opportunity and freedom to introduce students to real skills and get them excited about their futures.

I hope the Appropriations committees will make the financial commitment to support expanded learning opportunities for all kids in VT by allocating funds to the ELO Special Fund in FY19.

Thanks again, I am grateful for this opportunity.