

Hello. My name is Sara Robertson-Ryan and I live in Fletcher, VT. I'd like to thank 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 needs communities (communities like mine) 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.

Since the school day doesn't span the length of a typical work day, after school programming is essential. It is absolutely necessary for my children to have a safe environment for childcare; and having a chance for expanded learning opportunities will ensure that my children don't fall behind their peers academically.

I chose to live in Vermont, in Franklin County because I want the space for my children to connect with nature and enjoy a small town community connection. I don't want this to be at an expense of their academic or social success. If programs weren't offered in my community (due in large part to my help in arranging such), I'm not sure we could continue to have both my spouse and I work or could continue to live in rural Vermont.

Many Vermonters feel the same way or are already stuck in making the hard choice of continuing a career or moving to a new location. Expanded Learning Opportunities and Childcare are crucial for growing families.

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 accomplish this would be to focus on supporting education initiatives during the out-of-school time hours where all Vermont youth have access to opportunities such as STEM learning and workforce development skills.

For every \$1 spent on quality expanded learning opportunities, Vermont gets back \$2.18 in long-term savings from reduced criminal activity and substance abuse treatment, as well as accruing benefits from increased high school graduation rates and work productivity.

You'll have families like my own *stay* in Vermont because we have safe, essential, and beneficial opportunities for our children to excel and not fall into the achievement gap.

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 FY19.

Thanks again, I am grateful for this opportunity.