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Good afternoon. My name is Barbara Russ and I am on the board of directors for Vermont Afterschool, a statewide non-profit that supports schools and community organizations in providing quality afterschool, summer, and expanded learning opportunities for Vermont's children and youth ages 5-18. I'm asking the Appropriations Committee to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million for Fiscal Year 2018. 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.

Quality afterschool and summer programs are directly in-line with the Governor's top three priorities: strengthening the economy, making Vermont more affordable, and protecting the most vulnerable.

As for strengthening the economy:

- Over 79% of Vermont children ages 5-18 have all available parents in the work force. For working families there is often a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are working and children are out of school. This gap is even bigger during the summer months and school vacation weeks.
- Researchers have identified that the stress that parents experience regarding their children's after school care costs businesses nationally between \$50-\$300 billion per year in healthcare and lost productivity. For a strong economy, Vermont needs quality, affordable afterschool and summer learning programs.
- In addition, many of Vermont's quality afterschool and summer programs place a strong emphasis on building skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)—all skills that are important to the future of Vermont's workforce. Today's students need learning experiences that help them gain knowledge and skills in the STEM fields, reason through tough problems, and discover creative solutions. Afterschool is a time and place where students can dive more deeply into STEM—and is a valuable resource in preparing Vermont's next generation for the jobs of tomorrow.

In terms of making Vermont more affordable:

- Research has shown that students who participate in quality afterschool and summer programs are more likely to succeed in school and go on to college. Studies have also shown that where students fall behind is not in the classroom but outside the school day and over the summer. In fact, up to 2/3 of the academic achievement gap can be attributed to differences in summer learning opportunities. When students fall behind, schools must take extra efforts in remediation and intervention which in turn can contribute to rising school budgets.
- In addition, the law enforcement community has recognized that the afterschool hours of 3-6pm are the peak hours for children and youth to engage in risky behaviors, experiment with alcohol and drugs, and commit crimes or be victims of crime. Every dollar invested in afterschool and summer learning programs can save Vermont tax payers \$2.18 in the future by increasing

students' earning potential, improving performance at school, and reducing crime, drug abuse, and juvenile delinquency.

As for protecting the most vulnerable, please consider kids who are hungry.

- In many schools, lunch is served at 11:30am or even earlier. The snacks and suppers provided during an afterschool program may be the only healthy food a child has access to until the next day.
- In summer, access to food is even more important, and summer food sites reach many more kids when they are an integral part of a summer learning program than when they are a stand-alone meal site.

Finally, in addition to the three overarching priorities for the state, the Governor has also identified STEM learning opportunities, such as summer coding camps, as a place to target investment. Instead of setting up a separate fund and structure, once funding is allocated to the ELO Special Fund—a fund which already exists to support afterschool and summer programs—that money could be used to support summer STEM opportunities as well.

We know from research and from practice, that afterschool and summer learning programs are essential to our economy, our future workforce, and our children's well-being. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I hope you will include an appropriation for the ELO Special Fund in the budget for FY18.