



38 Eastwood Drive, Suite 100
South Burlington, VT 05403

P: (802) 865-0255
F: (802) 865-0266
HungerFreeVT.org

April 4, 2018

Dear Chair Ayer and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare,

Hunger Free Vermont is proud to support afterschool programs in our state and respectfully requests that the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare includes a request for \$300,000 for the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund in your budget memo this year. 1 in 5 Vermont children live in homes struggling to put food on their table and may not have access to enough nutritious meals at home. Thankfully, Vermont has a strong system of nutrition programs available to help children access the nutrition they need to learn and grow. Unfortunately, only about 20% of children who rely on school meals during school hours also have access to out-of-school-time meals during summer, school breaks, and afterschool hours.

From our work with schools, camps, community organizations, and other groups who are committed to helping more children access meals during these crucial times, we know that meal programs are more successful when they also include activities and educational programs. We also know that those activities and educational programs are more successful when they provide free meals using federally-funded nutrition programs. Having access to successful programs can have a huge impact on children and their families. Unequal access to summer learning opportunities accounts for more than half the achievement gap faced by low-income students. Children at risk of obesity are more likely to gain weight in the summer when access to nutritious food is less stable. And, adding the cost of free meals at school back in to the family food budget during summer and school breaks puts a big strain on the household budget overall forcing families to make difficult financial decisions.

Families across the state struggle every day to figure out how to ensure their children are safe, cared for, and well-fed while they are at work. In fact, over 79% of Vermont children ages 5-18 have all available parents in the work force. Working families often have 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. Afterschool and summer programming is crucial to these families' economic security and success, and funding for these programs is needed.

Vermont Afterschool recently learned that national groups are committed to providing a fellow to help with the start-up for the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund grant program, if Vermont allocates a significant state appropriation into the Fund for FY19. We are joining Vermont Afterschool in requesting \$300,000 for FY19 in the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund, so that we can take advantage of this rare opportunity to invest and grow Vermont's afterschool and summer learning programs. Thank you for your attention to this opportunity, and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Faye Conte".

Faye Conte
Advocacy and Education Director