

Budget Hearing - Saint Albans, Vermont - Monday, February 25, 2019

Dear Vermont House and Senate Committees on Appropriations,

My name is Heather Moore. I am an Enosburg Falls resident, member of the Enosburg Initiative, Enosburg Food Security Council, Enosburg Community Center, and, through my position as Director of the LEAPS Afterschool Programs, a member of the Berkshire Farm-to-School team. I am here today to talk about Afterschool and Farm-to-School funding.

In a community surrounded by farms, families still go hungry. Some children don't even know what their vegetables look like when rooted to the ground. Some families don't know how to prepare meals from scratch, which is cheaper and more nutritious than prepackaged meals. And still others cannot afford to buy fresh produce or protein.

I have known hunger. At \$30/wk to feed two young adults, I often skipped meals and fell into a coffee addiction that helped suppress my appetite, allowing me to stretch my budget further. I often wonder if living off meals of pasta and butter, store brand mac n cheese, and ramen noodles contributed to my food-related health problems I recently developed. For this reason I empathize with these families and I have become integrated in helping others avoid such situations.

Hunger is a mean, proud creature denying individuals the base resources that grounds humanity in kindness, resiliency, productivity, and growth. Farm-to-School programs are designed not only to help people be fed, but also to educate them on ways to cook nutritious food within a budget and to grow their own food, even if they live in an apartment.

A few months ago, I wrote a grant and the Berkshire Elementary School was awarded funds to help formalize their Farm-to-School program. Programs such as this one will help the local economy by allowing the school to make more local purchases, help the ecosystem by adding more vegetation to the school grounds, and help students and their families by providing a series of in and out of school activities that promote gardening, cooking and nutrition.

As much as I am thankful that Berkshire was awarded this grant, it still saddens me that only 38% of project requests for Farm-to-School projects are funded. I am grateful that the legislature has increased Vermont's investment in Farm-to-School over the past years to \$231,000 and ask that the work continue to grow with additional support so \$500,000 be made available annually so we can bring this powerful program to 75% of our schools by 2025.

Farm-to-School is a community passion of mine. After buying our home, my husband and I put in a vegetable garden. Our then 3 year old son spent hours watering, weeding, and exploring bugs in "tomato world" as he called it. Together, we cooked, canned, and ate fresh produce daily. I watched as he nourished his body and his understanding of the world expanded. I should also add that due to his experiences in the garden and kitchen, he eats 90% of all fruits and vegetables available locally. He even requests salads. My

son's experience is in true harmony with current Vermont AOE educational initiatives of learning and is a great example of farm-to-school outcomes.

Farm-to-School programs have been working as a grassroots means to supplement education for a long time. The curricula help enrich the offerings of afterschool programs. For years I have taught cooking classes to youth in grades 7-12 in a 21st Century Community Learning Center afterschool program here in Franklin County. Always, they learn where their food comes from and how to grow vegetables at home. This is supported by the incorporation of school gardens into summer programs. At the end of every class my heart was always filled with joy at knowing those in my class were steps closer to reaching or maintaining lifelong food security.

Afterschool programs play a major role in the success of Farm-to-School programs. Afterschool programs provide an opportunity for "third space" learning that connects school-day lessons with out-of-school experiences. For those of you who are unaware of what the third space is, it has recently been identified as anything outside the first space (home) and the second space (school). Besides being here tonight to support Farm-to-school funding, I am here to thank you for the amazing investment of \$600,000 in afterschool programs. Each of my eight years in afterschool programming has been burdened with the threat of funding loss. Whether it be cuts to a school board, State or Federal cuts, or the loss of grant opportunities, each loss of even \$100 is felt as a major hardship to our already too small budgets. As much as we mourn when funds are lost, we rejoice in all contributions to our cause. Thank you.

In the Crossroads Afterschool Program where I previously worked and my new position in the LEAPS Afterschool Programs for Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union, we believe that youth make a better Vermont. Afterschool programs provide youth an opportunity to learn, be themselves, and to grow into healthy and happy Vermonters. For many, afterschool and summer programs are a tool to help families provide their children with safe, supportive, and nurturing environments. These programs are often the foundation for youth to develop healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices and reduce youth risk factors, such as drinking, drugs, thoughts of isolation, and worse. The staff, volunteers, and partnering organizations in afterschool and summer programs are often viewed as the village that helps make raising a family here in Vermont possible.

In closing, I would like to again thank you for your support in both Farm-to-School and afterschool programming. I would also like to ask that you continue to increase the monetary support that makes these programs successful in sustaining our economy and raising our children, which in turn makes Vermont an amazing place to live from generation to generation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather Moore', with a long, wavy horizontal line extending to the right.

Heather Moore