

**Testimony for State of Vermont Budget Hearing
(Winooski, VT) Monday, February 10, 2020**

Hello, my name is Barbara Russ. Thank you for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

And, thank you for the six hundred thousand-dollar investment you made last year, to increase access to afterschool programs. The funds have been allocated through the Afterschool for All grant program. This is a great first step, but the state needs \$2.5 million annually to reach all youth.

All Vermont youth should have access to high quality third space programs. The third space is everywhere youth are when they are not at home or at school. An annual appropriation would ensure all high needs communities in Vermont could get the financial support they need to provide access to quality third space opportunities.

Youth in Vermont want and need what we all want and need. They want to be successful, need community connection, opportunities to learn, and access to recreation and other activities. They have a right to explore interests, connect with each other and build skills—and these opportunities should exist throughout our State. We can work *with* youth to provide many opportunities for young people to grow into healthy and happy Vermonters.

Third space opportunities help families by providing safe environments where children can continue their learning while their parents are at work. They keep youth safe, provide positive adult role models, provide real opportunities to lead, and offer time to build strong, healthy relationships with peers. An estimated 22,000 youth across Vermont who are not enrolled currently in an

afterschool program would participate if a program were available in their community. This represents a 33% unmet need for afterschool programs in Vermont.

An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million is an investment in Vermont's children, youth, and families that addresses key State concerns, targets those most in need, and supports a prosperous and vibrant Vermont. We know we can get Afterschool for All with a \$2.5 million annual state investment. Please move forward now with Afterschool for All. Young people make a better Vermont – our future depends on them. Thank you for your consideration.

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