

**Testimony for State of Vermont Budget Hearing (Rutland, VT)
Monday, February 25, 2019**

Hello, my name is Barbara Russ. I am an educator and live in South Burlington. Thank you so much for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

And, thank you to the Appropriations Committee for the \$600,000 investment you made last year in afterschool programming as a prevention tool.

Young people make a better Vermont and when we value youth as they are, just by being young people they enrich our communities. Young people are problem-solvers who are eager to be engaged. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that all young Vermonters are safe, healthy, supported, educated, and engaged.

I am testifying this evening to ask the Appropriations Committee to consider an annual appropriation of \$2.5 million so that all Vermont youth have access to high quality third space programs. What is the “third space”? The third space is everywhere youth are when they are not at home or at school. The third space is an important place for our youth to get what they need as they grow up. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million 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, and want and need to be loved and appreciated for who they are. They need community connection, opportunities to learn, and access to recreation and other activities. Vermont youth 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 be young and to grow into healthy and happy Vermonters.

Third space opportunities help families by providing safe environments where their children can continue their learning while their parents are at work. They keep youth safe, provide positive adult role models, provide them real opportunities to lead, and offer time to build strong, healthy relationships with peers.

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—both now and in the future. We know from research and from practice, that third space programs are essential to the health, well-being, and success of Vermont's children and youth. Young people make a better Vermont – our future depends on them. Thank you for your consideration.

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