

My name is Holly Morehouse, and I am the Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool, a statewide nonprofit. Thank you for your time today.

I'd like to ask the Appropriations Committees to allocate funding to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs, particularly for low-income children and youth and in underserved areas of the state. The request for \$2.5 million was arrived at with great care and intention and is based on two years of research by the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) legislative working group under Vermont's PreK-16 Council.

Afterschool programs are an essential component of statewide prevention efforts. Reports from the Marijuana Commission, the Opioid Coordinating Council, and the Advisory Council on Child Poverty and Strengthening Families all recommended investments in afterschool and out-of-school activities for Vermont's youth because afterschool programs are true primary prevention for all risky behaviors- not just substance use.

The connection between quality afterschool programs and healthy, engaged Vermonters is proven, research-informed, and clear. Consider the following:

- **Peak Hours.** On school days, the hours between 3-6pm are the peak hours for youth to commit crimes, be in or cause an automobile accident, be victims of crime, smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs.<sup>1</sup>
- **Risky Behaviors.** Research also shows that youth who are isolated, bored, and unsupervised outside of school are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as school failure, drug use, and delinquency.<sup>2</sup>
- **Proven Prevention.** In comparison, Vermont's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) found that students who participate in extracurricular activities 10 hours or more each week are significantly less likely to use any alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana than those who did not participate in any activities. Participating students also showed much higher levels of "belonging" in their communities.<sup>3</sup>
- **Research-Based.** Vermont Afterschool has signed a 5-year contract with researchers in Iceland, and we are currently supporting implementation of a pilot version of their prevention model in six Vermont communities. Data collected from 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students in those communities this fall (with an 82% participation rate) show clearly that alcohol and marijuana use are high among Vermont teens and that one of the most significant risk factors is a lack of afterschool opportunities.

Vermont communities are ready for this investment. We celebrate the \$600k of one-time money from the Tobacco Settlement Fund that was allocated last year. With those funds the Child Development Division established the Afterschool for All Grant Program, and there are afterschool programs running in Vermont communities today where there were no or few options before. However, over 100 letters of interest were submitted for those funds with requests totaling over \$5.4 million for projects over two years or approximately \$2.5 million per year.

A state investment of \$2.5 million to expand access to afterschool programming is not only a proven prevention strategy that is research-based and effective, but it is one that Vermont communities are in critical need of today. Thank you again for your consideration.

1 Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. Website: [www.fightcrime.org](http://www.fightcrime.org) (2019)

2 YMCA of the USA. (2001). After School for America's Teens.

3 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017. <http://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/population-health-surveys-data/youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs>.