

Barbara Russ
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Hello, my name is Barbara Russ. Thank you for holding budget hearings and allowing public testimony to be submitted outside of those hearings.

I am writing to ask that you please support the Governor's proposal to increase the Child Care Financial Aid Assistance Program (CCFAP) by \$7 million to increase families' access to afterschool and summer programs across the state. And, please support the language in the budget bill to create a grant structure for the cannabis sales tax funds allocated to expanding access to afterschool programs.

The interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force is committed to building a system for Universal Afterschool so that all youth and their families that want to access an afterschool or summer program have options in their community, and that those programs have the resources needed to meet the needs of all youth, regardless of where they live.

Young people enrich our communities. They 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. Youth in Vermont 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. Our young people will make Vermont better if we listen to and respect their voices and provide safe and welcoming spaces for them to explore their interests. We can work *with* youth to provide many opportunities for young people to grow into healthy and happy Vermonters.

Please support Universal Afterschool in Vermont in 2024. Young people make a better Vermont—our future depends on them. Thank you for your consideration.