

To: House Committee on Ways and Means
From: Nicole Miller, Executive Director, Vermont Afterschool
Date: April 26, 2023
Re: Afterschool in VT - Current Landscape and Universal Afterschool

Good morning. For the record, I am Nicole Miller, Executive Director, Vermont Afterschool. We are a statewide nonprofit dedicated to strengthening programs, empowering youth, and expanding access to afterschool and summer programs so that all Vermont youth are active, engaged, connected, and heard. I also serve as a member of the Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force along with representatives from the Agency of Education; Department for Children and Families; the Department of Health; the Department of Mental Health; the Agency of Natural Resources; the Agency of Commerce and Community Development; Hireability and the Department of Labor; the Governor's Office; and Senator Sanders' Office.

I am so happy to be here with you today because Vermont Afterschool and many others have been working for years now to sustainably fund the afterschool and summer programs, including the school-age child care system. The good news is that we've done a lot over the last few years, and now, we have the unprecedented opportunity to create a universal afterschool and summer system.

First, a bit of background:

Afterschool and Summer Programs. When we refer to afterschool and summer, we are talking about programming that happens afterschool, over the summer, during school breaks, before school, and on the weekends – anytime that children and youth are outside home and school. Many different program types and revenue streams support the professionals who work to support our youth during those times. Program types include:

- **School-run programs.** These programs are administered by a school, district, or supervisory union, and most often, they are located within the school building itself.
- **Community-based programs.** These programs are administered by a community-based organization (municipality – libraries, parks and recreation; nonprofits; licensed child care centers; Boys & Girls Clubs; YMCA's; teen centers; etc.), often partnering closely with schools. They can be located in the school building or at other locations nearby.

Afterschool and summer programs can be supported by several revenue streams:

- **Title IV, Part B – 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21C).** Vermont has a robust 21C program funded and managed by the Agency of Education serving about 100 sites in communities across Vermont.
- **Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG).** The funding, administered through the Department for Children and Families, allows states to provide financial assistance to low-income families to access child care so caregivers can work or attend a job training or educational program. The funding follows the child or youth to whichever program they are attending as a way to lower the cost for their families.
- **CRRSAA (ESSER II) and ARP ESSER.** While temporary funding sources, these funds are being used at both the LEA (local education agency) and State level as different, but complementary, strategies to ensure all

children and youth are able to access programs during the height of the pandemic and initial recovery years.

- **Other Federal Funds.** These can include Title funds, Medicaid, and many others. The Wallace Foundation and Education Counsel recently published the **Building, Sustaining and Improving: Using Federal Funds for Summer Learning and Afterschool** guide (<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/federal-funding-guide-for-summer-and-afterschool.aspx>), which lists 12 other funding sources that could be used to support afterschool and summer. Many of these are incorporated into existing strategies in Vermont related to workforce, STEM and career exploration, full-service community schools, meeting the needs of families, and more.
- **Local funds.** Local funds can originate from school budgets, municipalities, fees from program participants/families, and/or private grants and donations.
- **Multiple Funding Streams.** Braiding funding streams allows afterschool and summer programs to develop financially strong, high-quality programs with fairly compensated staff and affordable opportunities for youth and their families.

Challenges. The afterschool and summer field, made up of professionals working across a wide variety of program types and funding sources, stepped up to meet the needs of youth, families, and caregivers during the height of the pandemic. However, as with many sectors, the field has faced a significant number of afterschool and summer professionals changing jobs and leaving the workforce due to low wages, lack of benefits, and fatigue from COVID challenges. This has led to a great deal of instability in many programs, along with the typical challenges of operating a program often times in a year-to-year funding cycle, meeting the needs of all youth, supporting staff, building community partnerships, and much more.

Universal Afterschool and Summer. Looking at the big picture, we envision a universal afterschool landscape in which youth and families who want to participate in high-quality afterschool and summer programming are able to do so because programs will be universally available, accessible, and affordable. A universal afterschool and summer model is a solution for all kids, all families, and all communities across our state, and we support a mixed delivery model in which schools, licensed child care programs, registered family child care homes, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, teen centers, and others providers are and can continue to be part of the landscape to meet the needs of those within the community.

Every young person will know they have a place to go after school and over the summer, and every Vermont parent or caregiver will know their kids are safe and cared for when they can't be at home. Youth will be able to pursue their career aspirations, build protective factors, develop workforce and life skills, and receive academic support.

Six keys to success.

- **Commitment.** Vermont has long been looked to by the national afterschool and summer field as an example, and that has only increased in the past few years. With large-scale support from both the Administration and the Legislature, including those in the room, the Vermont is seen as a state that

understands the importance of afterschool and summer programs for Vermont's children and youth. In 2020, the Governor set a goal for universal afterschool and summer in his State of the State speech and reiterated that commitment in October 2021 with the forming of the Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force.

- **Collaboration.** Through the Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force, cross-agency collaboration and partnership has been a successful model and has been highlighted nationally. Having a wide variety of state agencies at the table allows for broad scale efforts intertwined into multiple initiatives and stakeholder groups.
- **Coordination.** The model includes the cross-agency team to work closely with afterschool and summer programs to continuously improve quality and integrate input from all stakeholders, including providers and youth. This includes a commitment to a mixed delivery system where maximum flexibility can be applied to enhance each community's unique mix of resources, partners, strengths, and opportunities.
- **Improving Program Quality and Data.** We're working together to build on and promote common quality guidelines for all programs and be able to track impact and outcome data for the entire system. This will include offering technical assistance, professional development, and youth engagement opportunities.
- **Reaching Youth and Families.** We are committed to equity and have been engaging young people to help develop a deeper understanding of the potential barriers and challenges to accessing afterschool and summer programs, particularly for youth in rural areas, those who identify as BIPOC or LGBTQIA+, and youth with special needs.
- **Sustainable Funding.** We are developing a funding structure that includes revenue sources and grant programs so that every year, Vermont will have more access, availability, and equity in our universal afterschool and summer system. This includes utilizing the federal revenue streams I talked about earlier, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Child Care Development Block Grant, others that can support strategies related to workforce, STEM and career exploration, and meeting the needs of families, as well as state funding passed in 2020 in Act 164, cannabis sales tax revenue.

Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP). As shared above, school age child care programs are part of the afterschool and summer program landscape, and families access the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) to help cover the cost of programs for their children up to the age of 13. Vermont Afterschool has been working with the Child Development Division to encourage more programs to enroll in CCFAP and increase the number of school-age child care slots across Vermont. We support additional funds including the Administration's ask to include \$7M to expand school age child care through CCFAP, lowering the cost of programs for families.

Cannabis Revenue. As you know, there is proposed language related to the cannabis revenue in both H.300 and in the Governor's budget recommendations. Currently, they mirror one another, assigning the cannabis revenue to the Agency of Education through a special fund, creating an advisory committee comprised of the members of the Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force, and outlining the grant program. We support this language being more permanent, but how that happens is up to the Legislature. However, we'd recommend that language is updated across the board, so there's no delay in future progress, especially with some of the ESSER investments beginning to end.

Cross-Agency Collaboration and Advisory Committee. As mentioned a moment ago, the Advisory Committee would provide recommendations to the Secretary of Education regarding the universal afterschool grant program, comprised of the members of the current Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force. As shared above, having a cross-agency team has been highlighted as a national example, allowing a wide view of the afterschool and summer landscape; better understanding of the needs of youth, families, and communities. The collaboration between the Agency of Education and the Department for Children and Families' Child Development Division is foundational, given that they administer two of the major revenue streams supporting afterschool and summer programs. The other members are essential partners. For example, a program may need support or resources related to mental health or health care; business owners in a community may be seeing workforce challenges related to their employee's children or youth; a provider may need assistance to meet the needs of all youth; and programs may be interested in how to better partner with businesses related to career exploration and employment opportunities for older youth.

Mixed-Delivery System. This cross-agency collaboration mirrors the importance of the mixed-delivery system which already exists in Vermont communities. First and foremost, this approach provides choices for youth and families, essential to meeting their specific needs, interests, and promoting youth agency. Additionally, communities will be able to build off existing infrastructure, make decisions about what gaps exist, and choose how to move forward. The Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force has analyzed initial data to understand what capacity exists in each community and where the largest gaps between the number of youth and number of slots in afterschool and summer programs exist. This work will continue as we move forward to universal afterschool and summer.

Collectively, we can ensure that every youth has access to high-quality afterschool and summer programs regardless of where they live, what languages are spoken at home, how much money their families have, any special needs or disabilities that may require special accommodations, their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or any other factor. Thank you for investing in Vermont's youth, and in turn, their families, our communities, and the state.

I am grateful for the time to speak with you today.