

Good evening,

My name is Jamie Dansereau, and I am the Director of Afterschool and Summer Programming for the West River Education District in the Windham Central Supervisory Union, serving the communities of Jamaica, Townshend, Brookline, and Newfane. I am here tonight to urge you to support the Governor's proposal to fully fund the Afterschool Special Fund.

We are at a crossroads...not just in Vermont, but across the nation. In uncertain times, one thing remains clear: Afterschool programs must be a priority. They require consistent, sustainable funding to continue delivering the engagement, self-confidence, and social-emotional support that our students need and deserve. These are not accidental benefits of afterschool programs; they are essential components of the well-rounded education that Vermonters have valued for generations.

I have witnessed firsthand how afterschool programs help communities thrive. I have also seen communities struggle in their absence. In the areas I serve, there is no other option...without these programs, children would go home to empty houses, left to their own devices...often consumed by screens without supervision or support. Worse yet, as we all know, unsupervised time can lead to dangerous choices, including vaping, alcohol, and drug use.

Please don't force families to decide whether their child is old enough to stay home alone. Please don't ask children to "stay out of trouble" while they are left without guidance. Please continue to invest in afterschool programs that keep our children safe, engaged, and supported.

Some may argue that schools already provide activities during these hours...and for some students, that is true. Athletics, music, and theater are valuable...but not every child feels at home on a field, a court, or a stage. Fortunately, many schools are taking steps to support and elevate afterschool programs, recognizing their value alongside athletics, music, and theater. It's take that step as a state as well. Let's ensure that afterschool programs receive the same recognition and support they deserve.

By supporting the Governor's proposal to fully fund the Afterschool Special Fund, you are sending a message to Vermont's children and families...that you care about their well-being, not just during the school day, but their entire day!

Thank you for your time, your dedication, and your service to our great state.