

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to urge you to include \$150,000 in the FY2026 budget to create a grant program that will help Vermont schools implement cardiac emergency response plans. This funding would provide critical resources—AEDs and CPR training—especially for schools in rural areas where EMS response times can be longer. Right now, more than 200 Vermont schools have AEDs, yet our state’s cardiac arrest survival rate is only 7.5%—one of the lowest in the country. We can and must do better. With proper training and a well-executed response plan, survival rates can more than double.

This isn’t just a statistic—it’s about real lives. In the past decade, there have been 24 cardiac arrests at Vermont schools. Most recently, on January 3rd at a basketball game between Milton and Barre, 16-year-old Milton sophomore Dominic Barcomb collapsed. Thanks to Spaulding’s staff, coaches, and bystanders, who were trained and ready, Dominic survived. His life was saved because the school was prepared. As the fire chief in this community, I witnessed firsthand the power of preparation and quick action that day. Seeing the teamwork, coordination, and readiness of those involved was truly inspiring. It reinforced for me just how crucial it is for every school in Vermont to have the same level of preparedness. When seconds matter, having the right equipment and training can mean the difference between life and death.

Every school in Vermont should have that same level of preparedness. No student, athlete, coach, or visitor should lose their life simply because the right equipment or training wasn’t available. This funding is a small investment that could mean the difference between life and death.

Please help ensure that all Vermont schools are ready when seconds matter most. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Keith Cushman, Fire Chief
Barre City Fire Department
15 Fourth St
Barre, VT 05641
(O) 802-476-0254
(C) 802-793-5093