



May 7, 2024

Testimony Re: HB.8047

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Connecting for Children and Families (CCF) is a community-based nonprofit organization located in the highest need neighborhood in Woonsocket, one of RI's most under-resourced cities. CCF's mission is to serve Woonsocket/Northern RI by providing family-centered programs/educational opportunities that empower children, families, and individuals to thrive/succeed. We envision Woonsocket/Northern RI as a strong, uplifting community. Here, every person can thrive. Our vision is a community that works collectively to eliminate inequities; that is always listening and constantly evolving to more intentionally serve its members; and that takes care of each other, so every person achieves success.

Our work here is absolutely essential: CCF serves low-income Northern RI/Woonsocket families. Our primary target is Woonsocket,

- where the unemployment rate, (6.9% in February) is RI's second highest;
- 19.2% of residents live in poverty;
- the child poverty rate (29.5%) is the second highest.
- the high school graduation rate (64%) is the state's lowest;

People here struggle to pay for rent/heat/ electricity/ transportation, needed prescriptions, and such basic needs as food, formula, and clothing.

CCF has been providing high quality 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center programs since 2003 to over 1,200 students annually in four elementary schools, the middle schools and the high school in Woonsocket after school, during school vacations and in the summer. Our programs adhere to the Rhode Island Afterschool Quality Standards and Indicators. Due to decreased funding, we are not able to keep up with the demand for our programs and numerous families are placed on waitlists. CCF's out of school time programs are essential to students' academic, social and emotional success to grow and become productive citizens in a global community. Only 19% of Woonsocket third graders are meeting expectations in reading and 17% are meeting expectations in math. 12% of Woonsocket eighth graders are meeting expectations in reading and 6% are meeting expectations in math. Our out of school time programs support the classroom and provide continuous learning opportunities in literacy, STEM, arts, music, career exploration, leadership, service learning and physical activities. Too many students in Woonsocket are not able to benefit from these programs.

HB.8047 introduced by Rep Shallcross Smith, which provides \$4 million to support after school and school vacation, summer learning workforce development programs for K-12 students with annual reports on status and programs.



This support is critical to continue and grow the out of school time enrichment programs in Woonsocket. These programs are an important tool to support students' growth and knowledge in preparing them for success in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today, Connecting for Children and Families strongly urges your support for HB.8047 Education – Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time.

Sincerely,

Erin Spaulding  
Executive Director