

Good afternoon,

I am writing today in support of the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Bill, House Bill #8047, introduced by Shallcross Smith, and which is presently being heard in the House Finance chamber.

Since 2009 I have served as an educator, out-of-school time provider, and program manager with nonprofit organizations ranging from City Year to Young Voices. One of the very first service projects I ever coordinated after moving to Rhode Island was a tree-planting campaign at Roger Williams Middle School and Merino Park. So if you ever pull into the Merino parking lot and see a particularly robust pin oak standing right next to a tall red maple, know that both of those trees were planted by my students at DelSesto Middle School all the way back in the Spring of 2011. The efforts of those youth, who also participated in a Woonasquatucket River cleanup and constructed signs for the trail around the park in that same year, continue to have a positive effect upon visitors over a decade later. And this is only one example, one small slice out of many I could mention demonstrating the transformative power of afterschool programs. Our state's low-income youth simply will not, cannot receive this kind of hands-on learning anywhere else.

We all know that Rhode Island's public education is failing to adequately meet the needs of its students. Teacher shortages are now pervasive at every grade level. A 2022 report revealed that although our state ranks 3rd nationally in per-capita education spending, we are 38th in equitable distribution of that funding. Public schools in urban areas receive 13.5% fewer resources than wealthier districts statewide. Although the BOOST Bill would come nowhere close to evening those odds, it would provide a most necessary first step towards investing in the afterschool network that keeps our young people in Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Cranston, and elsewhere in places where they may feel safe, challenged, and loved.

An old proverb reads, "a society grows great when men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit." I am urging the honorable members of this committee to plant a tree today and support the passage of the BOOST Bill. The future leaders of Rhode Island, many of whom are patiently waiting to deliver their own testimony in the chamber today, will thank you.

Sincerely,

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