

To: House Finance Committee  
House Bill No.8047 RELATING TO EDUCATION -- BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN  
OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME  
From: Lesdin Salazar  
RE: Testimony in Strong Support of House Bill No.8047  
Date: May 9, 2024

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is **Lesdin Salazar**. I am writing to support 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.

As an alum of the Central Falls School District and an employee for the past eight years, this bill is important to me because I have experienced and witnessed firsthand the impact that after-school programs and staff have on students' lives. In my current role as Director of Equity Implementation, one of the initiatives I lead is a year-round program called the Learning Pods- a mentoring program that pairs students in grades 6-12 with a mentor from the community or "pod leader" as we call them, who provides academic, social, and emotional support to students outside of the school day. Pod Leaders work with students all year round, including vacations and through the summer, and our data shows that these types of opportunities outside of the school day **are working**. While our program has benefitted from funding like the Learn365 Initiative, as that funding period comes to an end, we are left looking for ways to sustain the mentors hired through that funding or making the difficult decision or cutting those positions, which will negatively impact our students.

This bill is important to me because, despite the data showing the positive impact that out-of-school programs like the Learning Pods, Project Goal, Providence County Wrestling Club, and many others, have on students' overall lives and well-being, without adequate funding, these opportunities are not sustainable; ultimately resulting in our youth suffering the consequences. After-school programs and opportunities provide safe spaces for our youth and by passing this bill, we are directly investing in our youth's wellbeing. Currently, 59,000 local youth do not have access to out-of-school program opportunities. We must invest in out-of-school time to ensure every student can access comprehensive and effective programming outside of traditional school hours and can continue learning throughout the summer.

I urge you to pass this bill because we often say that "it takes a village," to raise our children; While schools and many organizations are eager to provide out-of-school opportunities for the youth, we are not set up for success without equitable funding. Passing this bill sends a message to our youth that they are important to us, that out-of-school spaces are vital to their overall well-being, and that we are ready to invest in them.

Thank you for your time and commitment to ensuring our youth have the necessary opportunities and resources to thrive outside of the traditional school day.

In Partnership,

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