

May 7, 2024
Hon. Marvin L. Abney Chair
Finance Committee, Rhode Island House of Representatives
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H-8047, AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION – BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME ACT

The Afterschool Alliance is writing in support of House Bill 8047, introduced by Representative Shallcross Smith. The “Building Opportunities in Out -of- School Time (BOOST) ACT” would provide \$4 million to support afterschool and school vacation, summer learning, and workforce development programs for K-12 students with annual reports on status and programs. The Afterschool Alliance is a national nonprofit advocacy organization that works to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programming and we strongly urge you to support the BOOST Act. OST programs are locally driven solutions that are proven to help children learn and grow, families balance work with home, and employers hire the workforce they need.

The proposed BOOST investment will help provide more out of school time enrichment engagements for youth to explore new opportunities, collaborate with their peers, engage with and learn from educated mentors and develop healthy habits to best ensure their life skills development. The America After 3PM Report, released in 2020, found that Rhode Island parents understand and support the important role afterschool and summer programs play in their child’s education. Ninety-one percent of RI parents with a child in an afterschool program are satisfied with the support offered to their child. Moreover, *Rhode Island parents report that afterschool programs are a lifeline for working families*, with 86 percent of parents agreeing that afterschool programs provide working parents with peace of mind. However, demand for afterschool is on the rise in Rhode Island. For every child in an afterschool program, three are waiting to get in. Unmet demand has increased from 30 percent in 2014 to 44 percent in 2020, and the number of children unable to access afterschool programs has grown to over 59,000 youth.

Passing the proposed BOOST legislation will prioritize community collaboration and impact by convening OST experts, youth development professionals, and center community voice. The investment, less than one-third of one percent of the proposed state budget, will help to provide more out-of-school time enrichment for youth to explore new opportunities, collaborate with peers, engage with and learn from educated mentors, participate in informed community service projects, and grow healthy habits that support the development of life skills. OST programs also can provide unique opportunities to help young people develop their social and emotional skills, behaviors and beliefs, which can help students manage the challenges they have faced over the past several years.

What this means is tens of thousands of Rhode Island kids who previously went without would have access to OST programs that focus on hands-on, experiential opportunities, and 21st Century skills. And because OST programs are steeped in workforce development, they also serve to prepare our young people for the jobs of tomorrow. Simultaneously, OST programs allow low-income parents and caregivers the opportunity to prioritize their career improvement and upward mobility through access to higher education and extending career opportunities. These changes give families a shot at breaking the cycle of poverty and access to education and training that create pathways to individual long-term security, contribute to the economy and fill the gaps in under engaged workforce industries.

This investment in afterschool and summer programs from the State budget is a great start to ensure access for some of the 59,000 children and youth desperately in need of a quality afterschool programming to supplement learning and exploration of topics they find interesting. Out-of-school time providers are part of the system of support for students, families, and schools.

We need our elected state leaders to lean on the thousands of OST staff members across our state who are experts in supporting young people and fostering new interests and skills. It is time for Rhode Island to take advantage of the robust afterschool network that has been built in every community in the Ocean State.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Chris Neitzey, Director of State Policy
Afterschool Alliance

CC:

Representative Scott A. Slater, First Vice Chair
Representative Alex Marszalkowski, Second Vice Chair
Representative Karen Alzate
Representative Jacquelyn M. Baginski
Representative Nathan W. Biah
Representative Terri Cortvriend
Representative Grace Diaz
Representative John G. Edwards
Representative Raymond A. Hull
Representative George A. Nardone
Representative William W. O'Brien
Representative Brian J. Rea
Representative Teresa A. Tanzi
Representative Camille Vella-Wilkinson