



**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 0861 Building Opportunities for Out-of-School Time**

**Senate Finance Committee**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice our support for Senate Bill 0861 and thank Senator Cano for sponsoring. This bill would provide \$4 million to support comprehensive and effective after-school, school vacation, summer learning and workforce development programs for students in grades kindergarten through 12 and require an annual report to the General Assembly and the Governor on the status and progress of the program. We also thank the Governor for allocating \$4 million in the FY2024 budget for out-of-school time learning grants.

High-quality, organized after-school, summer, and out-of-school time programs improve the supervision and safety of youth, promote positive social skills, improve attendance and behavior, and, with sufficient dosage, improve student achievement. Quality out-of-school time programs provide engaging activities that are intentionally designed to promote youth development and are taught by trained, dedicated instructors who work effectively with youth. Youth who participate consistently can show improved competence, caring, and connections. **School hours only cover 20% of the time children and youth have available for learning, forming friendships, developing, and practicing skills, and exploring interests. What children do during out-of-school time matters for success in school and life.** Yet, there are not enough affordable, high-quality, out-of-school time programs to meet the needs of families and youth.

Currently, the state manages two systems to provide access to after-school and summer programs. One of these systems is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Education to invest federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds and served approximately 4,386 children and youth during the 2021-2022 school year and 1,573 children during the summer of 2019. The other system is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services which provides childcare subsidies to school-age children to attend after-school and summer programs.

The Afterschool Alliance, a national non-profit and leading source of data and research on after-school programs, reports **58,942 children in Rhode Island are without access to affordable, high-quality afterschool programs.**

Resources are needed to expand access. In Rhode Island, the Providence After School Alliance and the Rhode Island Afterschool Network (a United Way of Rhode Island program) act as intermediaries to address access issues and support program quality improvement.

There is a substantial gap between high-quality after-school and out-of-school time opportunities available to youth from low-income families compared to opportunities for youth from higher-income families, and higher-income families spend almost seven times more on enrichment activities which **contributes to persistent gaps in student outcomes.**

Out-of-school time programs have provided crucial services to students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic including assistance with academics, accessing technology, and addressing food insecurity for families. State investments are needed to expand access to high-quality after-school and summer programs and to build and sustain an effective out-of-school time workforce.

We urge you to pass this important legislation. High-quality after-school and summer programs are a key strategy for helping children who have lost learning time due to the pandemic catch up on academics and can help reengage children and youth who had high rates of absenteeism or been disengaged. These programs also support children's social-emotional health.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.