



February 3, 2025

TO: Senate Committee on Education

Subject: Support for Afterschool Learning and Enrichment Grant Program (SB 896)

Dear Chair Senator Frederick, Vice-Chair Senator Weber, and Committee Members,

I am the Chief Executive Officer at the Walla Walla YMCA that serves Milton-Freewater and Athena-Weston, Oregon. I strongly support SB 896 to fund afterschool grants, ensuring all children have access to high-quality programs. Afterschool programs enrich lives, support families, and strengthen communities.

This legislation ensures direct funding access for community-based organizations (CBOs), recognizing their expertise. Annually, our YMCA serves over 60 children in our rural Oregon afterschool programs and 180 youth in our summer programs in these communities.

Summer and afterschool programs play a crucial role in supporting children's and adolescents' mental health by providing safe, structured, and enriching environments. These programs offer numerous benefits, including:

1. **Emotional Well-being & Stress Reduction** – Engaging activities, supportive mentors, and positive peer interactions help reduce anxiety, depression, and stress, offering children a sense of stability and belonging.
2. **Social Connection & Relationship Building** – Programs foster friendships and teamwork, helping children develop communication skills, empathy, and self-confidence while combating loneliness and isolation.
3. **Physical Activity & Healthy Routines** – Many programs incorporate sports, outdoor play, and mindfulness activities, which are proven to boost mood, reduce stress, and promote overall well-being.
4. **Academic & Personal Growth** – Low-pressure learning environments support academic confidence while creative and skill-building activities enhance self-esteem and resilience.
5. **Safe Spaces & Trusted Mentors** – These programs provide a safe, supervised setting where children can express themselves, seek guidance, and receive emotional support from caring adults.

Investing in summer and afterschool programs is an investment in the mental health and well-being of our youth, helping them thrive both in and out of the classroom. We urge your support for SB 896 and stand ready to assist.

Sincerely,

Karen Hedine, CEO
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