



STATEMENT OF
Jodi Grant, Executive Director
Afterschool Alliance on
Senator Lamar Alexander's Discussion Draft of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization Bill

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Afterschool Leader Warns that Senate Education Proposal Would Eliminate Essential Afterschool Programming for America's Children

Statement of Jodi Grant, Executive Director, Afterschool Alliance

“The discussion draft of an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bill released last week by Senate HELP Committee Chair Lamar Alexander (R-TN) would eliminate the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative that supports afterschool, before-school and summer programs for 1.6 million students across the nation. Instead, Senator Alexander's proposal would create a ‘Safe and Healthy Student’ block grant that would allow local education agencies to apply federal afterschool dollars to a wide array of in-school and out-of-school-time initiatives. The bulk of the funding for this new block grant would come from what is now the 21st CCLC initiative.

We believe this would be a mistake that results in fewer families having access to the quality afterschool, before school and summer programs that keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and help working families.

Local school systems are already financially strapped, squeezed by budget cuts at all levels of government. Forcing afterschool programs to compete for dollars with other necessary services delivered during the school day would inevitably result in less funding for these essential programs and fewer afterschool opportunities for students. That is precisely why the 21st CCLC was created as a separate funding stream, and why it continues to be so vital today.

In the absence of afterschool programs, essential learning opportunities that help young people prepare for college, careers and life would no longer be available. In addition, more students would be unsupervised during the afternoon hours when juvenile crime and other risky activities are most likely to occur. Further, working parents are just now moving beyond the recession and its aftermath and would be forced to struggle to find safe, supervised, educational activities for their children during the hours between the end of the school day and the end of the work day.

Our recent nationwide survey of 30,000 households found that the majority of parents support public funding for afterschool programs, and that support crosses party lines. Ninety-one percent of parents

who identify as Democrats, 86 percent who identify as Independents and 80 percent who identify as Republicans favor public funding for afterschool programs in communities with few opportunities for children and youth.

Senator Alexander's discussion draft would also bar faith-based and other community-based organizations—as well as tribal organizations, nonprofits, for profits, local governments, colleges and universities, and others—from serving as lead grantees for out-of-school-time programming. Only school districts would be permitted to apply for funding under the Alexander bill, threatening the rich and resource-stretching relationships between afterschool programs and community organizations.

Reams of research demonstrate the value of afterschool programs to our children, families and communities. For all these reasons, we urge Senator Alexander to revise his draft bill to preserve and adequately fund the 21st CCLC initiative. We intend to work with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to ensure that ESEA is reauthorized in a way that protects and expands the afterschool programs that students, working families, communities and the country need.”

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.