



NEWS RELEASE
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Recent Stratford High School Grad Gia Fires Returns to Oklahoma After Sharing Views on Afterschool Programs with Officials in Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. – As part of a visit sponsored by PSO/AEP Public Service Company of Oklahoma, recent Stratford High School graduate Gia Fires, who attended the Stratford SAFE C3 afterschool program, spent part of this week meeting with U.S. Senators and Representatives and their aides to discuss the importance of investing in afterschool and summer learning programs for youth. Gia is one of just six afterschool students from five states selected to travel to Washington, D.C. for the annual Afterschool for All Challenge, organized by the [Afterschool Alliance](#).

On Wednesday, Gia shared her experiences and perspectives on afterschool programs with members of Congress, emphasizing all the ways afterschool programs broadened her horizons. AEP Public Service Company of Oklahoma sponsored Gia's visit in collaboration with the [Oklahoma Partnership for Expanded Learning](#) (OPEL) and the Afterschool Alliance.

“PSO congratulates Gia for being chosen to share her afterschool learning and STEM experiences with her peers, education leaders and lawmakers. We recognize the opportunities high quality, educational after school programs can offer students; particularly in areas like teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking skills,” said Stuart Solomon, President and Chief Operating Officer for PSO.

“This trip was a whole new experience for me,” said Gia. “I loved meeting new people from all over the country and getting a chance to speak with Representative Tom Cole and Senators James Lankford and James Inhofe about how the SAFE C3 program had such a positive impact on my life. I can't wait to participate in the Challenge again!”

The Afterschool for All Challenge is an annual event that brings together afterschool program providers and experts, along with students, to showcase some of the innovative activities their afterschool programs provide.

“Students like Gia speak so eloquently about the kinds of innovative, hands-on learning activities that quality afterschool programs offer students,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “These programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families. They help young people discover their passions and have fun while they learn. We need to

increase public and private funding so all students can take advantage of the opportunities afterschool and summer learning programs provide.”

“We were beyond thrilled Gia was able to travel to Washington DC to share her experiences about afterschool in Oklahoma and the impact it made on her life.” said OPEL Network Director Megan Stanek.

Participation in afterschool programs has increased to 10.2 million students nationwide, up from 6.5 million in 2004, according to [the America After 3PM household survey](#) of 30,000 U.S. families, commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance. In Oklahoma, 13,443 students participated in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) during fiscal year 2016. Through a report by the Afterschool Alliance we know an additional 230,198 children would enroll if a program were available in their area. One in five students in the country today is unsupervised after the school day ends.

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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.

The Oklahoma Partnership for Expanded Learning (OPEL) is a partnership of organizations that recognize the success of and continued need for ELO programs throughout our state. More information is available at www.opelok.org