

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: ^{WM Speaking}
Jennifer Barahona



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Testimony from the Norwalk AfterSchool Alliance in support of H.B. 7348

March 12, 2007

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Gaffey, Honorable Members of the Committee. My name is Jennifer D. Barahona and I am the chair of the Public Information & Advocacy Task Force of the Norwalk AfterSchool Alliance. I am also the Director of the Center for Youth Development at Family & Children's Agency [FCA] in Norwalk where we operate an After School Program for middle school youth. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Norwalk AfterSchool Alliance **in support of H.B. 7348, An Act Concerning After School and Out-of-School Time Grants.**

The Norwalk AfterSchool Alliance is a citywide collaborative of more than forty organizations that are working together to expand and improve out-of school time offerings for students grades K-12 in Norwalk. Our vision is to create a community where every child has high quality out of school time activities available to them that address their needs, including safety, academic support, recreation and opportunities to build skills. The network of providers in Norwalk provide academic support and homework help, enrichment activities, opportunities to learn about the Norwalk community, exercise and athletic activities, and safe environments where children can develop socially and emotionally.

While we are proud of the services the programs in the Alliance provide, we realize that we are only serving a small percentage of the young people in our city who need out of school time activities. Last year we served nearly 1,600 of Norwalk's 11,000 public school students, only a fraction of the number of those that need and

want afterschool and summer programs. Our programs receive calls every day from parents throughout the city looking for opportunities for their children. The majority of these parents work outside the home and desperately need childcare after school and often before school as well. Unfortunately the programs that we operate are at capacity, leaving few options for working parents, especially low income families who have few resources. In the program we operate at FCA we are limited to serving only 25 students because we do not have the physical space or funding to expand staffing to serve more children. After school programs throughout the city are forced to seek funding almost exclusively through limited private foundations. The Norwalk AfterSchool Alliance was created in part to work collaboratively with the funding available to meet the needs of the most children possible. We share resources so that we are able to offer enrichment activities, staff trainings, and youth forums across the city to multiple programs. But without state funding to compliment local resources, Norwalk simply cannot meet the needs of children in our community, especially those that are low-income and at risk.

H.B. 7348 would make funding available for programs such as ours and allow us to serve more children who truly need the kind of programming we provide. Just last week we had an 8th grade student approach one of our staff members at the Norwalk Public Library. He was curious about the program that we offered there and asked staff how he could get in the program. He told them “I want something to do after school because if I don’t have anything to do I know I’ll get myself into trouble”. Although we were at capacity, we were so taken by this young man that we made an exception and allowed him into our program after speaking with his mother. We know there are hundreds of thousands of school aged students across Connecticut who are in the same situation as this young man. We must put our resources into providing programs that ensure their safety and well-being and ask you to support HB 7348 so that we can continue to do this by serving more children. Thank you.