

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2452 — The BOOST Bill
Senate Finance Committee
May 20, 2026

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Jess Corsentino, and I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 2452, the BOOST Bill, which would provide funding to support the mental health and emotional well-being of children and youth in out-of-school time settings.

As a Program Manager for 21st Century Learning / COZ programs in Pawtucket, I see every day how important afterschool and summer programs are for our students, families, and school communities. Our programs serve elementary-aged students across Pawtucket and provide safe, structured, relationship-based spaces where children can build confidence, strengthen social skills, engage in hands-on learning, and feel connected to caring adults.

Out-of-school time programs are not simply an extension of the school day. They are a critical part of the support system children and families rely on. In COZ, students receive homework support, enrichment opportunities, social-emotional learning, family engagement, and access to trusted adults who know them well. We work to support the whole child by helping students come to school ready to learn and leave prepared to lead productive lives.

The BOOST Bill recognizes what many of us in youth-serving programs already know: children's mental health and emotional well-being must be supported in every environment where children learn, grow, and build relationships. The bill's purpose is to invest in out-of-school time programs as trusted, community-based spaces that foster connection, stability, resilience, and belonging. The legislation would provide \$100,000 to support evidence-informed initiatives for children and youth in kindergarten through grade twelve, including mental health first aid, trauma-informed practices, and related learning opportunities for OST staff, youth leaders, caregivers, and partners.

In Pawtucket, we are seeing a growing need for these supports. Many students come to afterschool carrying the stressors of the day, challenges from home, peer conflict, anxiety, grief, behavior struggles, or difficulty regulating emotions. Our staff are often the people who help students process those moments, reconnect with peers, calm their bodies, and return to a place where they can participate successfully. However, in order to do that work well, staff need training, resources, and support.

Funding through the BOOST Bill would help programs like ours strengthen prevention-based supports before children reach a point of crisis. It would allow out-of-school time staff to better recognize student needs, respond with trauma-informed strategies, build stronger relationships with families, and connect students to appropriate supports when needed. These investments would also help reinforce the protective factors that are so important for youth development: belonging, safety, consistency, positive relationships, and opportunities for voice and leadership.

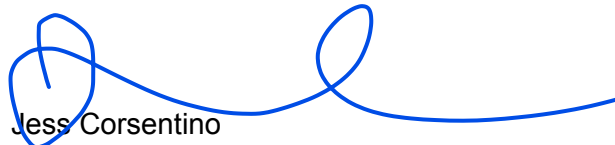
Afterschool and summer programs are uniquely positioned to support this work because students spend meaningful time with us outside of the academic pressures of the school day. In these spaces, children often open up, take healthy risks, try new activities, develop friendships, and build trust with adults. When supported well, OST programs can improve school engagement, reduce isolation, strengthen family connections, and help students feel that they matter.

This bill is a small but meaningful investment in a statewide network of programs already serving children and families. It also acknowledges that youth mental health cannot be addressed by schools alone. Families, community partners, and out-of-school time programs must all be part of the solution.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support Senate Bill 2452, the BOOST Bill. Investing in the emotional well-being of children in out-of-school time settings is an investment in stronger students, stronger families, and stronger communities across Rhode Island.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large loop on the left and a long, sweeping line extending to the right.

Jess Corsentino
Program Manager, 21st Century Learning / COZ
Pawtucket School Department