

Good afternoon members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Chrys Santos, I am a 10th grader at Blackstone Academy Charter School and a youth at Young Voices, an afterschool program in Providence, RI. I am writing today in support of bill S2452 which would provide funds to after school activities and extracurriculars for mental health support, school engagement, and other parts of their programming.

The bill is really important to me because I struggled with depression for a very long time in high school, often feeling stressful and draining. Which made it worse, and I had no motivation to do well in school or to do well for myself. When I discovered Young Voices, a youth organization, I felt like I had purpose. I started advocating for myself and others in my community, and found my voice. Now I have a safe space to be at after school, and my learning doesn't feel limited to only one building. I've gotten to learn about different career fields, advocacy, resume building, and so much more than I would have without an afterschool program.

We need to pass this bill because it could help other teenagers like me feel like they have purpose and can make an impact in their lives and communities. With more funding to afterschool programs, more students will have access to other opportunities that can be life changing.

I urge you to pass bill S2452 so that students, instead of being introduced to their power as a part of the community, are able to grow up with it.

Thank you for your time and attention today.

Sincerely,

Chrys Santos



Good afternoon members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The youth of Young Voices wish to express their strong support of S2452 introduced by Representative Shallcross Smith, which allocates \$100,000 to support socioemotional and mental health supports for out-of-school time programs in Rhode Island. This bill is important to us because third spaces are vital places for young people to meet, learn, and share power. Without programs like Young Voices, our thoughts and ideas would often go unnoticed. Out-of-school time programs give young adults like us a place to feel safe, seen, and loved.

Currently, almost 60,000 urban youth in our state are without afterschool program opportunities, and even more lack access to social workers and counseling support. It is critical that we invest in out-of-school-time programs so that every student has access to comprehensive and effective socioemotional learning during afterschool and summer programs. Thanks to the support we have been provided, the youth of Young Voices have been able to participate in mental health awareness, testimony writing, the creation of a fashion show, advocacy, research, and many other opportunities that would never be offered during the normal school day. Millions of young people like us rely on these opportunities, and it is imperative that we continue to fund them and make them accessible to all youth.

We hope that you make the right decision and pass S2452, for the benefit of Rhode Island youth and the flourishing of all.

Thank you for your time and attention today.

Sincerely,

The Youth of Young Voices

Good afternoon members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Oscar Diaz Ramirez, I am a 9th grader at Classical High School and a youth at Young Voices, an afterschool program in Providence, RI. I am here today in support of S2452 which would provide 100k to support mental health in out-of-school time/after school programs.

The bill is really important to me because I have almost nothing to do after school and I'd rather not be at home by myself. Sports and some clubs already have cliques which are hard for me to try and fit in with them. Having something like a specific program which I actively like will allow me to have a place where I can be myself.

We need to pass this bill because students who aren't in sports need to be able to have a space to go and be themselves and socialize. Even without school programs, out of school programs can provide students with a safe space and a chance to encourage participation. Communities can come together and become closer since the younger generation tends to shut themselves in.

Bill S2452 should get passed because it'll allow students to socialize more. If not it'll still be able to create possible opportunities for future students to be able to participate and have fun.

Thank you for your time

Oscar Diaz Ramirez

Good afternoon members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Sofia Cubillos Viasus, I am a 12th grader at Jacqueline M. Walsh School and a youth at Young Voices, an afterschool program in Providence, RI. I am here today in support of S2452 which would provide one hundred thousand dollars in the fiscal year 2026-2027 budget to support the mental health and emotional well being of children and youth through investments in out of school time.

The bill is really important to me because it allows students to participate in programs of their career interest. It opens the door to networking with different students/professionals outside of the school setting. It provides a safe space to students without a supportive network. It also creates more opportunities for students with economic disadvantages.

We need to pass this bill because it contributes to a stronger community among the youth by diversifying their learning spaces. It facilitates the process of gaining new friends for shy people. It improves and expands knowledge previously learned at school.

I firmly believe that this bill will create an impact for the future of the youth of Rhode Island by expanding their opportunities to learn outside of the standard school setting. Please support all students across the state by passing S2452.

Thank you for your time and attention today,

Sofia Cubillos Viasus