

## PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

### TESTIMONY OF KISHA BIRD

Project Director,

Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development

Good afternoon members of the PA House Democratic Policy Committee. I want to start by thanking Representative Wheatley and his colleagues for holding this hearing on this vital issue and for generously inviting me to testify today. I am honored to be in the company of the insightful panel that you have gathered here. I am Kisha Bird, Director of the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network.

The Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (Network) is a collaborative effort among state, regional and local partners. Its purpose is to promote sustainable, high quality out-of-school time youth development programs through advocacy and capacity building to enhance the welfare of Pennsylvania's children, youth and families. The Network has 30 major partner organizations and membership of over 200 individuals representing the academic community, provider and advocacy organizations, state and local government, and philanthropic institutions from communities across the state of Pennsylvania.

Across Pennsylvania communities are working together to develop safe, affordable and enriching out-of-school experiences for school-age children and teens. These opportunities may occur before school, after school and/or during the summer months for youth ages five to 18. The National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices defines extra learning opportunities as supervised activities designed to promote learning and positive development beyond the traditional school day. Afterschool programs come in many different forms including academic support, service learning, organized sports, homework help, arts and music, tutoring, volunteering, community service and scores of others.

Research documents the value of quality afterschool and youth development programs for helping improve school performance, increasing parent productivity in the workplace and preventing kids from being victims of crime or committing crimes. Research indicates that characteristics of promising programs include:

- Supportive relations w/adults
- Supportive relations w/peers
- Student engagement



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- Appropriate structure
- Autonomy opportunities
- Cognitive growth opportunities
- Mastery orientation

Research also tells us that afterschool programs have greater affects on:

- Low-income children; (Marshall et al., 1997; Pettit et al. 1997; Posner & Vandell, 1994; TASC evaluation)
- Children with limited English; and (TASC evaluation)
- Low achieving students (TASC evaluation)

We know that at the community-level, Pennsylvania has a long history of providing afterschool services to children. In fact, this state has some of the oldest afterschool programs in the country, including the Sarah Heinz House in Pittsburgh, which has provided academic enrichment and socialization services to immigrant and low-income families since in the late 1800s. Throughout the last twenty years the state has allocated federal and state funds to support a number of afterschool initiatives. Some of Pennsylvania's strategies include:

- School Age Child Care Project – Since 1986 the Commonwealth has made resources available through four regional entities to provide training and technical assistance to develop high quality school age programs.
- Workforce Investment Boards – Pennsylvania appropriates \$15 million in funding each year to support youth activities at the community level through the WIBs. These resources are coupled with over \$52 million in funding from the Workforce Investment Act that support youth training and employment programs.
- ELECT Student Works – This innovative pilot project provides resources for comprehensive afterschool activities to students in grades 4 – 8 attending the Erie, Harrisburg, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh School districts designed to improve learning and reduce teen pregnancy and other risky behaviors.
- Tutoring Programs – Pennsylvania has appropriated a combined \$70 million for tutoring programs in fiscal year 2005-06. The vast majority of these funds (\$66 million) make up the Educational Assistance Program that provides grants to districts that have schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind standards. The remaining \$4 million constitutes the continuation of the Education Support Services Program (“Classroom Plus”) established in 2001. It provides for small grants (up to \$500) to parents of students in grades 3-6 who score poorly on state exams.

Additionally, federal funding through the 21<sup>st</sup> Community Learning Centers is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). This funding enables schools and communities to provide critical opportunities to our youth. Currently there are 109 grantee programs in over 300 sites serving over 17,000 students.

Afterschool and youth development programs are offered by a patchwork of providers including school districts, non-profit and community-based organizations, libraries, recreation centers and faith institutions that partner with businesses, 4-H clubs, and colleges and universities to name a few. Young people are provided with a variety of enrichment experiences ranging from academics to career exploration to recreation and art and music activities.

Public opinion polls consistently show Pennsylvania voters support more quality afterschool and youth development programs statewide. A public opinion poll of Pennsylvania voters conducted in April 2005 by the Global Strategy Group, confirmed the public's feelings that afterschool programs provide safe, supervised programs for kids until their parents get home. A majority of voters say there are not enough afterschool programs in Pennsylvania. Voters, both statewide and in the Pittsburgh area, say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports increased funding for afterschool programs. Voters, both statewide and in the Pittsburgh area, think tutoring and homework assistance is the most important activity offered at afterschool programs. However, they also believe afterschool programs should be more than just another few hours of school. Job training and skill development is second. Voters also believe afterschool programs are an effective way to address a number of issues facing children. Afterschool programs help most to address the issues of child safety and youth violence and crime. The top message for increasing funding for afterschool programs is that they provide a safe, supervised environment until parents can get home.

In the first ever household study commissioned by the JC Penny Afterschool Fund and the Afterschool Alliance, America After 3, we know that 26 % of Pennsylvania's K-12 youth are responsible for taking care of themselves. These children spend an average of more than 6 hours per week unsupervised after school. Communities seeking to expand and improve quality, affordable afterschool and youth development programs are hindered by the lack of a comprehensive statewide plan for these programs.

The Pennsylvania Afterschool/Youth Development Network is bringing together providers, funders and partners to develop a comprehensive plan for improving and expanding afterschool and youth development programs statewide. Through a series of regional summits, the Network found:

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- Communities face specific challenges to new and better programs;
- Several innovative public-private partnership models exist across the Commonwealth; and,
- Providers, advocates and communities need a coordinated comprehensive plan to achieve new and improved programs statewide

A recurring theme of providers was a feeling of isolation because in many areas of the state program providers are competing for the same kids, the same funding and the same resources. Further, there's no "one-stop shop" for information, advocacy and research for afterschool and youth development in Pennsylvania. Many providers are looking to the Network to bring together providers and advocates statewide to channel resources and efforts into one consistent voice on state policy matters while also serving as a clearinghouse for research on best practices, data collection, program supply and demand and funding opportunities.

Two parents of youth participants of the Pittsburgh Children's Museum afterschool program said this about the value of afterschool:

- *Afterschool programs makes things possible that schools can not.*
- *Programs that involve kids in community organizations after school foster a stronger network of families who care about their town and their children. These connections are the building blocks of strong communities.*

The intent of the Network is to bring together many public and private leaders to support ongoing and sustained efforts to improve and expand afterschool programs, building on our history and the promising practices that already exist within our state. Supporting afterschool programs means strengthening families and communities by providing information and resources to increase parental involvement, reduce at-risk behaviors, and promote healthy lifestyles among young people. Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire learning, and help working families. Thank you again for inviting me, and the opportunity to provide testimony, I'll be happy to take questions.

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