

Submitter: Kylie Johnson  
On Behalf Of: YMCA Youth and Government  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure: SB5506

I wouldn't be writing testimony at this moment, and I wouldn't know how to right testimony at this moment if it weren't for the YMCA's Youth and Government program. Expanded learning programs like Youth and Government have been a critical part of my upbringing and education. In 8th grade, I struggled with anxiety and depression, largely because I was locked up in my house, scrolling through social media, and seeing the world in pieces. I had no community to be a part of.

Then, in my freshman year of high school, I joined Youth and Government, and the program's rich, lively community transformed my life. I discovered a passion for advocacy and politics and made some of my greatest friends. Most importantly, this program has inspired me to engage in more communities and mobilize other people to advocate for what they believe in. This year, I was elected as Oregon's 78th Youth Governor, and I am extremely grateful for all the program has done for my peers and me.

Kids can learn lessons and valuable information from Summer and After School Learning Programs that they might not be able to learn at school because these programs are hands-on, student-centered, and results-driven. I've learned more about legislation through Youth and Government than I ever would have by reading a textbook because I essentially got to live like a legislator for three days at our program's conference.

I am a better student, citizen, and friend, and I feel far more prepared for higher education and career pathways after high school because of Summer and After School Learning Programs like Youth and Government. That is why I ask you to address and remove administrative barriers that limit or prevent community-based, culturally responsive summer and after-school learning and enrichment programs from accessing grant funding. I urge you to vote for this bill and provide kids with memories and lessons that they'll cherish for the rest of their lives.