



STATEMENT OF JEN RINEHART
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Afterschool Leader Urges Lawmakers To Honor Commitment to Afterschool Programs

“The President’s budget proposal falls short of meeting our nation’s need for afterschool programs. The afterschool community recognizes that America faces difficult times, but we also know that adequate funding for afterschool is an investment, not a cost. At a time when our nation has a compelling and indisputable need for more afterschool programs, even a modest cut to funding leaves schools and community groups without enough resources to meet the need. The President’s budget proposal would give the 21st Century Community Learning Centers federal initiative less than half the money authorized by the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* established a multi-year roadmap for slow but steady growth in afterschool funding, reflecting what was then – and what remains today – a national consensus that afterschool should be expanded. The Fiscal Year 2006 funding level established by the *Act* was \$2.25 billion. Today the President proposed just \$991 million – far less than what was promised in *No Child Left Behind*, and less than he proposed last year. This afterschool funding gap leaves 1.75 million children without the afterschool programs Congress and the President agreed to in *No Child Left Behind*.

Americans want lawmakers to honor the commitment they made in *No Child Left Behind*. An election-day poll conducted for the Afterschool Alliance found that American voters want an increase in federal funding for afterschool programs, even if it means higher taxes. It found that 82 percent of voters agree that ‘public officials should increase funding for afterschool programs.’ Support crossed all party and demographic lines.

We ask federal lawmakers to grow the federal afterschool initiative so that it can meet the needs of more families. Today the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative provides grants to afterschool programs that serve approximately 1.4 million children across the United States. That’s far from meeting current demand for afterschool programs.

More than 14 million kindergarten through 12th-graders take care of themselves after the school day ends, including almost four million middle school students in grades six to eight. Too many of those children become involved in gangs, crime, drugs or alcohol, or sexual activity in the hours after school.

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Add One, Rinehart

In his State of the Union address, the President announced a three-year boys' initiative that Mrs. Bush will run. He said, "we need to focus on giving young people, especially young men in our cities, better options than apathy or gangs or jail." We commend that new initiative, and remind lawmakers that closing afterschool programs is not the way to keep boys out of gangs.

The Afterschool Alliance will continue to work with parents, educators, religious and business leaders, and concerned citizens to convince lawmakers to increase funding for afterschool programs in FY 2006 – because our children need and deserve them.

Congress was right to promise \$2.25 billion for afterschool in FY 2006, and fully funding afterschool would be the right thing to do now."

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