April 20, 2026

Chair Tom Cole
Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of the Afterschool STEM Hub, we write to convey our priorities for FY 2027 as you and your colleagues develop annual appropriations bills. The Hub is a coalition of nearly 30 national afterschool and summer organizations and stakeholders committed to ensuring that afterschool and summer learning programs are fully recognized and supported as integral components of the nation's science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education ecosystem.

STEM fields drive American innovation, economic competitiveness, and national security. Preparing today's students to become tomorrow's problem-solvers and leaders requires sustained, hands-on engagement with STEM concepts. Afterschool and summer programs extend learning beyond the traditional school day, providing high-quality environments where young people can build their confidence and technical skills in STEM. They also develop the durable skills (such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity) that are crucial in today's workforce and essential for modern citizenship. Jobs in STEM fields—especially in high-growth areas like artificial intelligence (AI), data science, and cybersecurity—are fueling the current expansion and growth of our economy. Afterschool programs provide opportunities for youth to experiment with these emerging technologies and fields, as well as engage in critical discussions on their responsible and thoughtful implementation in society.

77%

of parents agree afterschool programs help their children gain interest and skills related to STEM[1]

90%

of 21st Century Community Learning Centers offer STEM learning opportunities[2]

Congress has consistently recognized the importance of STEM education and expanding STEM talent pathways, such as through the CHIPS and Science Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. In addition, continued investments in STEM education programs through the FY 2026 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill demonstrate bipartisan support for building an inclusive, future-ready workforce. The full promise of these laws depends on sustained investments across a variety of learning spaces that broaden participation in STEM and ensure access to high-quality learning opportunities for students of all backgrounds and communities.

Afterschool and summer STEM programs are uniquely positioned to advance these national goals. Federal investments across multiple agencies provide critical resources—including competitive grants, technical assistance, evidence-based curricula, and public-private partnership opportunities—to enable high-quality afterschool STEM programs that are relevant and exciting to young people. These programs introduce students to high-demand fields, connect them with mentors and industry partners, and reinforce classroom learning in applied, real-world contexts.

As you consider FY 2027 funding priorities, we respectfully urge continued and robust support for federal programs that expand access to high-quality afterschool and summer STEM learning. Strategic investments in out-of-school time STEM education yield measurable returns: stronger academic achievement, increased STEM interest and persistence, and strengthened local economies. Sustained appropriations will ensure that the nation's STEM education ecosystem remains comprehensive, inclusive, and aligned with long-term economic and workforce needs. Therefore, we respectfully ask you to:

1. **Expand investments in existing STEM education programs at NSF, NASA, NOAA,** and other mission-based federal agencies. Their education programs make STEM come alive for young people, inspiring many to pursue STEM degrees and careers.

2. **Preserve and fully fund the National Science Foundation's Directorate for STEM Education.** This directorate is critical to developing a well-informed citizenry and a diverse and capable workforce of scientists, technicians, engineers, mathematicians, and educators. Its programs support STEM education at all educational levels and in a variety of settings, including in afterschool.

3. **Increase funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) by $750 million to $2.09 billion** in the FY 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. 21st CCLC is the only dedicated federal funding stream for afterschool, and nearly 1.4 million youth and their families rely on these programs. These afterschool programs reflect local priorities, and the funding increase is necessary to meet the demands of increased program costs, parental needs, and community desires. We also recommend that the program include a priority for STEM across all states' 21st CCLC competitions to reflect the country's STEM workforce needs.

4. **Preserve and increase funding for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant program under Title IV-A in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to $1.6 billion.** With this grant, states and districts have the flexibility to provide well-rounded education programs, including Computer Science and STEM, to some of our most under-resourced students both inside and outside the classroom.

5. **Increase funding for and encourage STEM programming in the Child Care Development Block Grants and Head Start** grant program at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to ensure our youngest learners have access to high-quality STEM learning.

If you have any questions about afterschool STEM or the policy and funding priorities of the Afterschool STEM Hub, please email us at **stemhub@afterschoolalliance.org**. Thank you for your attention to these views, and we look forward to collaborating with you.

Sincerely,

Anita Krishnamurthi
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Afterschool Alliance

Leslie Brooks
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Afterschool Alliance

1. Afterschool Alliance (2025). America After 3PM - Lost Opportunity: Afterschool in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many.
2. Afterschool Alliance (2026). 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Accelerating Learning. Supporting Families. Earning Results.