



Public Advocacy Information from the Illinois After-school Alliance To Increase Support for Quality After-School Programs

This information packet includes various ways all non-profits and charitable organizations can work to help support after-school programs. The range of steps outlined are:

- 1.) Knowing what you can and cannot do as a non-profit or charitable organization in terms of public education, advocacy, and registering your users to vote.
- 2.) Responding to Action Alerts on the issues from state and national sources.
- 3.) Let your neighbors know your views on the issue by writing letters to the editor and phoning call-in shows on TV and radio.
- 4.) Testify at public hearings or tell your state and federal legislators your concerns at any public forums they may hold on their own.
- 5.) Set up a meeting with your state legislators or members of Congress for them to see your program and hear your concerns.
- 6.) Ask your local mayor, city council, and county board to endorse after-school programs and funding at the state and federal level at their official meetings.

If you would like to become a member of the Illinois After-school Alliance, contact Lydia Taylor, the Illinois After-school Alliance Coordinator at 312-986-9200, or go to preventingviolence.org and download the forms from the web and send them to the Illinois After-school Alliance by e-mail, fax, or regular mail.

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1.) Know what you can and cannot do as a non-profit or charitable organization in terms of public education, advocacy, political activities, and registering your users to vote.

A.) *Non-Profits/Charities and Political Activity:* While charities and 501(c)3's cannot engage in partisan activity, there are still many ways to legally educate and discuss issues with your elected representatives, educate voters, and promote issues and participation in non-partisan ways. See the web site of the Chicago based Donors Forum, www.donorsforum.org; or national groups like Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest at www.clpi.org and Independent Sector at www.independentsector.org for information on political activity and lobbying (generally under their Public Policy sections). A tool kit in *.pdf form from the National Council of Nonprofit Associations on what nonprofits can and cannot do under federal tax law is at www.ncna.org/uploads/documents/live/Election_tool_kit2.pdf.

B.) *Register to Vote:* Register to vote and help your service users register to be able to participate in elections. Mail-in forms to register or to change the address of old registrations should be available at all state government offices (drivers license bureaus, unemployment offices, etc.); public libraries; and most local government offices. City and County Clerk offices should have forms available for organizations to keep at their own offices. Forms are also available on the web at www.elections.state.il.us/Voteinfo/Pages/VoteRegForms.htm.

2.) Respond to Action Alerts from organizations that watch legislation and analyze policy affecting youth and families.

The places mentioned below are meant as a starting point and will have links to additional resources.

A.) *Illinois After-school Alliance:* The most recent Alliance Action Alert is at <http://www.icvp.org/afterschoolalliance.asp> with sample letters to send to the Governor and your elected legislators.

B.) *Afterschool Alliance* is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of afterschool programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all children. They primarily focus on federal issues and help state networks working on out-of-school time efforts. Their web site is at: www.afterschoolalliance.org

C.) *Voices for Illinois Children* is a non-profit, non-partisan, statewide group of child advocates. For its regular action alerts and other policy news, go to its web site at www.voices4kids.org.

D.) *Action for Children:*, has championed the cause of quality child care and early education for families and children throughout Illinois for 35 years. Their web site and public policy and advocacy program can be reached at www.actforchildren.org

E.) *Fight Crime: Invest in Kids* is a bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization led by more than 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, victims of violence and leaders of police officer associations. Its mission is to fight crime by supporting early care and education programs for preschoolers, good schools, after-school programs and prevention of child abuse through research, media relations, and advocacy by its members. It has state chapters, including one in Illinois, and an action center for active citizens to use at www.fightcrime.org. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois is a joint project of the national Fight Crime: Invest in Kids organization and the Illinois Center for Violence Prevention (ICVP).

You can access the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids web site by clicking on the following address: <http://www.fightcrime.org>. You can access ICVP's website at preventingviolence.org

F.) *The Ounce of Prevention Fund* works with parents, policymakers and early childhood providers to ensure that more young children grow up safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready for school. It runs a policy and advocacy page at www.ounceofprevention.org that is a joint policy project of the Ounce of Prevention Fund and Family Focus, Inc.

G.) *Work, Welfare and Families* is a coalition of organizations in Illinois working together to educate about and promote public policies that improve the well-being of low income families in Illinois. They have an alert system on state and federal policy issues and issue a Weekly Review e-newsletter with events and alerts on issues at their website www.workwelfareandfamilies.org.

3.) *Let your neighbors know your views on the issue with letters to the editor and call in programs.*

A.) *Write Letters to the Editor* to your local newspaper: Some of the resources cited above under “Respond to Action Alerts” offer help and sample letters to the editors on issues, including recent Illinois After-school Alliance Action Alerts. The national group, *Afterschool Alliance*, also has resources for accessing the media on their web site at: www.afterschoolalliance.org

B.) *Phone call-in shows* on TV and radio with your concerns on the issue.

4.) *Testify at public hearings, or other appropriate public forums officials hold.*

Testify or take advantage of any public forums, town meetings, public question and answer sessions that your elected officials may hold on their own to get your views on the issue known. Your officials hold these forums because they want to hear from you, their constituents, on what matters most to you. YOU are the best person to speak about the effects of budget cuts on your family and your community.

QUICK TIPS ON PUBLIC TESTIMONY TO PANELS/ELECTED OFFICIALS:

- 1) It is best to keep the testimony short, to the point, and polite
 - a. The spoken piece should be 2-3 minutes at the most.
 - b. Type it up and copy it for distribution to the entire panel – **proofread** and **spell check it** before putting it on organization letterhead (if appropriate). It should not be more than 2 pages at a maximum in large font (12 pt.) for easy reading.
 - c. You should include:
 - i. Who you are, your position and your organization &/or where you are from,
 - ii. Why you are giving testimony, and
 - iii. What experience or expertise you have on the subject.
- 2) Thank any sitting officials for any past efforts they have done on behalf of your program/after-school issues
- 3) Personalize the testimony with specific references to your program or events, and especially how the budget cuts in after-school over the last few years have hurt the program and cut services to the youth in your community and hurt families.
- 4) Give facts and figures if possible about the benefits of your program, the need for your program, and how a loss or increase of funding would impact your services.

5) Practice what you will say with your friends before you come to the panel.

6.) Above all, speak from your heart about what concerns *you and those you serve*. You *are* an expert about what you care about. If possible, have parents or youth speak about the importance of afterschool with your support.

5.) *Set up a meeting with your state legislators or members of Congress for them to see your program and hear your concerns.*

Call your elected official and ask them to visit your program to educate them on the issues, or meet them in their office during their office hours. If you would like help to set up a meeting, in your district or in Springfield, contact the Illinois After-school Alliance at 312-986-9200.

6.) *Ask your local mayor, city council, and county board to endorse after-school programs and funding at the state and federal level at their official meetings through resolutions*

SAMPLE RESOLUTION FOR SUPPORT OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, the citizens of _____ stand firmly committed to quality after-school programs because they:

- Provide a safe, friendly learning environment for our kids that boosts their academic achievement;
- Support working families by ensuring that their children are safe and productive after the regular school day ends;
- Build stronger communities by involving our students, parents, business leaders and adult volunteers in the lives of our young people and
- Encourage families to become more effective partners in their children's education.

WHEREAS, *NAME OF LOCAL PROGRAM(S)* has provided significant leadership in the area of community involvement in the education and well-being of our youth, grounded in the principle that quality after-school programs are key to helping our children become successful adults; and

WHEREAS, many after-school programs across the country are facing funding shortfalls so severe that they are being forced to close their doors;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that *THE CITY COUNCIL or COUNTY BOARD of...* calls on the Administration and Congress (or Governor and General Assembly) to fully fund (or increase funding for) XXX afterschool program in the FY06 budget.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that *THE CITY COUNCIL or COUNTY BOARD of...* calls on Governor Rod Blagojevich, the Illinois General Assembly, the Congress of the United States, and President George W. Bush to support after-school by fully funding current programs and supporting efforts to increase funding to expand programs to additional communities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution shall be forwarded to the members of the Illinois Congressional delegation, Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, President George W. Bush, and Governor Rod Blagojevich and members of the Illinois General Assembly.