



## LETTERS

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### **After-School Programs**

We must continue the fight for after-school programs for all!

Recently the U.S. House of Representatives Labor-HHS- Education Appropriations Subcommittee approved \$1 billion for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers after-school program, which is level with last year's funding. The Senate subcommittee followed suit, also appropriating \$1 billion for the program. That is \$400 million more than the administration's proposed budget and an enormous victory for all of us who know the value of after-school programs.

The 21st CCLC program is an important initiative providing critical funding for quality, best- practices after-school programs that serve more than 53,000 children in communities throughout Florida. Successful after- school programs offer a safe academic environment during the time before most working parents can get home and before school for all the late-starting schools.

Congress should be commended for restoring the 40 percent cut in these times of fiscal challenge. It knows that after- school programs work. It also recognizes that the demand for this program far exceeds current funding. In 2002 alone, only 25 percent of Florida communities that applied for 21st CCLC grants received funding.

Although level funding is a great victory, more is needed to continue to keep kids safe, to provide quality chances for students to improve academically and to ensure the security of our neighborhoods. Current funding provides after-school programming for more than 1.3 million children across the country. However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are as many as 15 million ``latchkey" kids who need somewhere to go when the school day ends. An additional \$250 million for after-school programs this year would help provide programs to more than 350,000 additional children.

Children need our help and our voice. Now is the time to build on this victory and to make after-school programs a reality for children everywhere!<

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