



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Good morning - my name is Kayla Brathwaite and I am currently in 10th grade at Park East High School in New York City. I am honored to be here today representing the one million young people who are involved in afterschool and summer learning programs supported through the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program at the U.S. Department of Education. I am here to tell you about my experience in the program and to request that your committee provide level funding of \$1.15 billion for the 21st CCLC program in the fiscal year 2014 appropriations process.

Before I begin, I would like to say that I am here today with my mother who probably appreciates these funds and the programs they provide even more than I do since these programs allow my mother to be at her job knowing that I am in a safe place at the YMCA. Thanks mom for making the trip with me today. I promise you that this is just as educational as being in school.

First, let me briefly tell you a little about my neighborhood and my school. I live in Queens, New York – the most diverse county in the United States. A place where most families have two working parents when times are good and where after school programs are not a luxury but a necessity. As I said, I go to Park East High School, a small public high school in Manhattan. Although I like my school and I like my neighborhood, I know that I am one of the lucky ones,

one of the lucky kids in New York City who has the support of the people around her and an organization like the YMCA to help her succeed. Outside of the afterschool program, there really are very few positive opportunities for kids in my neighborhood. You are either in an afterschool program or you are just hanging out. It really isn't a surprise to me that the hours between 3 and 6 p.m. are the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. Also, during the summer months, first time use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs peaks among kids 12 to 17.

I have been participating in YMCA programs funded through 21st CCLC funds since I was 8 years old. When I was in middle school I was lucky enough to have access to an after school program at MS210 in Queens. The program kept me safe and off the street during the afterschool hours, but more importantly, this program had a special focus on teaching me about advocacy, public policy, leadership skills and the importance of civics education and being a part of the solution to our society's problems. As a matter of fact, it's this program that gave me the skills and confidence to be here today. I learned in the program that my opinion is important and my voice is powerful. I'm proud that I am able to put that lesson to work for me here today.

Now that I am in high school, I participate in two Y programs – Teens Take the City and Youth and Government. Both programs teach me about how government works and how I can make a difference. This year, I was even elected Queens Borough President by my peers. I have run for election, drafted and proposed legislation and helped debate some issues important to my work group. I feel like I have a taste for what all of you do and can decide later about whether to pursue a career much like yours. It has been an incredible experience, all made possible

through public funding for after school programs like 21st Century Community Learning Center funds. The program is a partnership between the YMCA and the school and provides hands-on activities for me and the other participants. The best part of afterschool programs is that they help lessons we learned in school come alive. The programs compliment – but don't replicate – the learning that takes place during the school day.

Enough about me, I am here today for all youth who need these programs to succeed and for all parents who need these programs to help keep their jobs and for the employers who employ those parents – we should not forget that these programs or the lack of these programs will have an effect on our economy. I believe that spending one dollar on a 21st Century Community Learning Center gets you the benefit of spending three dollars – one on an academic enhancement program, one on a high quality child care program and one on an economic development program. No matter how you look at it, the program benefits us all.

One point that I think is really important is that the funding that you provide generates a lot of funding from other sources. In New York City, the YMCA has received over \$10 million in private donations to help support afterschool programs and other services for kids and families from donors like the NY Life Foundation, Bloomberg and the Morgan Stanley Foundation.

I know that funding is tight and now is not the time to be asking for increases in spending, however, it's important for you to know that the Afterschool Alliance reports that there are 15 million children who are left to take care of themselves after the school day ends each day. The 21st CCLC program provides services for only one million children, so there is obviously a

huge need to someday expand the program so that all young people have the same opportunities that I had.

While I've heard that it is difficult for Congress to agree on things, I'm thankful that the 21st CCLC program has been supported by both Republicans and Democrats in the past. I encourage you to continue with this support and provide level funding of \$1.15 billion for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program. Of all the thousands of programs in the federal government, this is the one that is most important to me. I wouldn't be here without it.

Thanks so much for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this morning.