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## Afterschool Advocacy In Action

**April 2025**

# Ensuring Continuity: Advocating for New Jersey's Child Care Infrastructure Amid HHS Regional Office Closures

*By Tyneisha Gibbs, Director of Policy & Youth Advocacy*

The unexpected closure of five regional offices within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—including Region 2, which serves New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—has introduced significant uncertainty into the future of child care and early education funding. These offices have long supported key programs such as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and Head Start, which thousands of New Jersey families rely on for high-quality, affordable care.

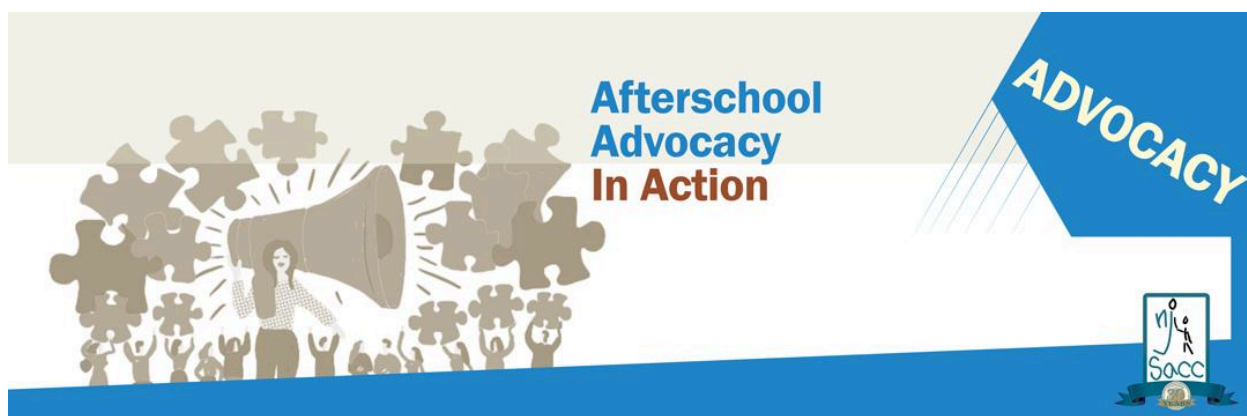
With no transition plan released and affected staff placed on leave, it remains unclear how grant administration and program oversight will move forward—especially with new grant cycles beginning May 1.

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### What This Means for New Jersey

For providers, families, and advocates in New Jersey, the closure of Region 2's office could have immediate and long-term consequences:

- **Delays in Grant Processing:** Without assigned federal points of contact, state agencies and local providers may face delays in receiving critical child care and



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### Head Start funding.

- Reduced Support for Providers: Regional staff often provided technical assistance, guidance, and oversight to ensure program quality and compliance.
- Potential Disruptions to Services: If funding streams are interrupted, the availability of child care services—especially for low-income families—may be affected.

This comes at a time when New Jersey's child care sector is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, grappling with workforce shortages, financial challenges, and rising demand for services.

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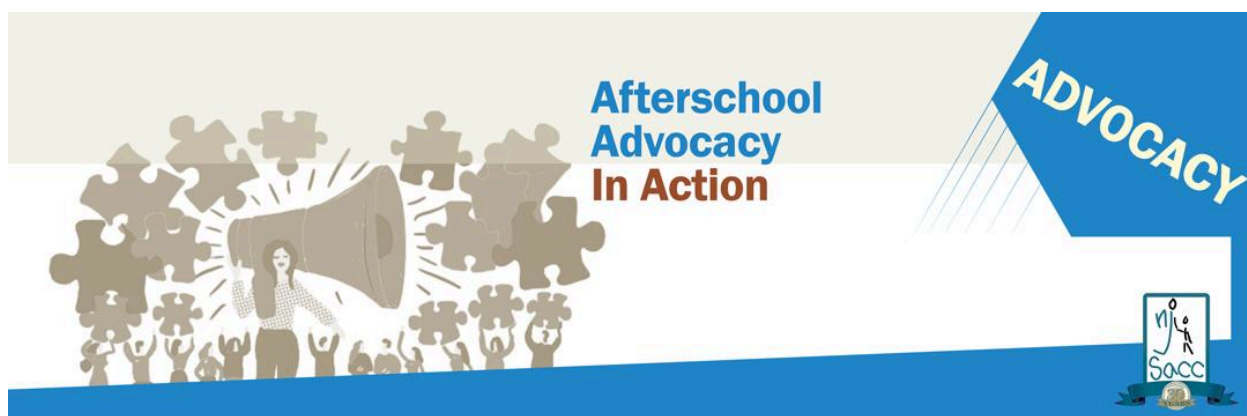
### What You Can Do: Advocate for NJ Families and Providers

Now is the time to come together in advocacy, education, and awareness to ensure that New Jersey's child care system remains strong, funded, and supported.

#### **Call Your Federal Legislators**

Ask them to:

- Seek immediate clarity from HHS on how Region 2's responsibilities will be reassigned;
- Advocate for transparent, uninterrupted administration of federal child care and early education grants;
- Ensure that providers and families in New Jersey are not left behind in this transition.



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 [Find your U.S. Senators and Representatives here](#)

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### **Join Forces with other Advocacy Partners**

Collaboration strengthens our voice. These organizations are actively working to protect and advance early childhood services in New Jersey:

- [NJAEYC \(New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children\)](#)  
A leading advocate for early childhood education professionals, NJAEYC is a vital resource for mobilizing action and staying informed.
- [Child Care Aware of New Jersey](#)  
Works to promote accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care through advocacy and public awareness.
- [Advocates for Children of New Jersey \(ACNJ\)](#)  
Champions policies that benefit children and families, including child care and early learning access.

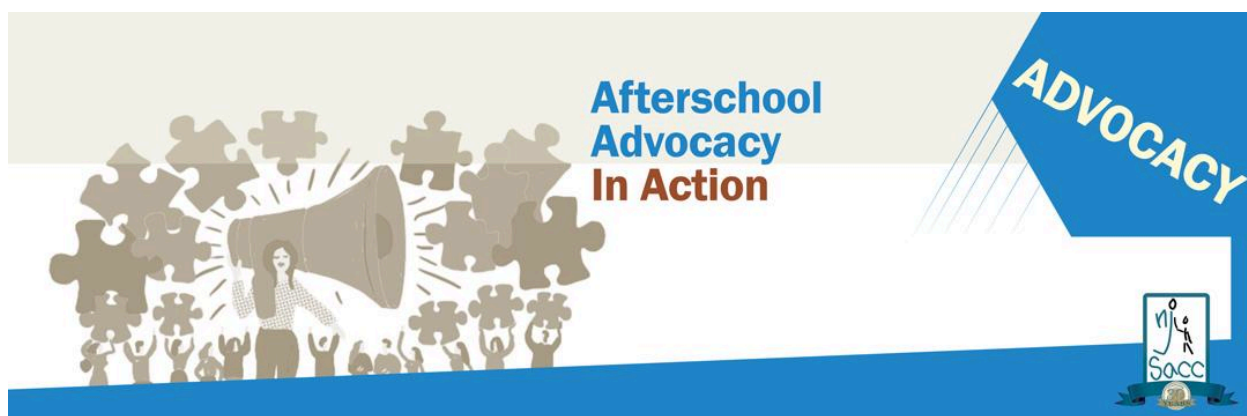
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### **Stay Informed and Involved**

Keep up with announcements from the New Jersey Department of Human Services, participate in public comment opportunities, and share your experiences. Your voice helps shape how child care is funded and supported moving forward.

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At NJSACC, we believe that every child and family deserves stable, quality care, regardless of administrative changes. Together, we can ensure that the needs of New



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Jersey's childcare community remain a priority—because when we advocate together, we grow stronger together.

### **Federal Cuts to Violence Prevention Programs Jeopardize Safety and Support for NJ Youth**

At NJSACC, we are deeply alarmed by the U.S. Department of Justice's recent decision to rescind \$811 million in federal funding intended for Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention (CBVIP) programs across the country. For New Jersey, this means a devastating loss of over \$35 million in critical support for organizations that serve as a lifeline for young people — especially in communities already facing chronic disinvestment.

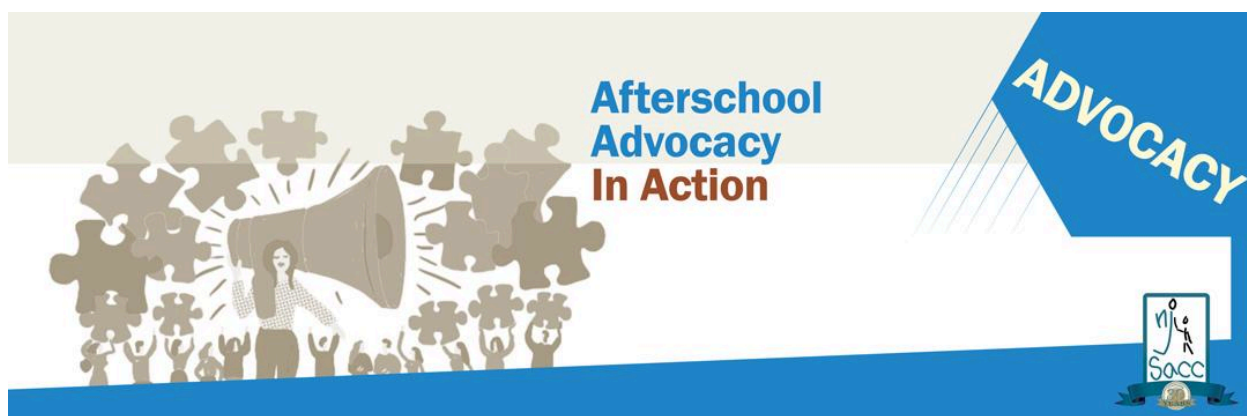
These programs are more than just lines in a budget. They represent boots-on-the-ground work in mentoring, trauma-informed care, mental wellness support, rehabilitation, and school safety. They are led by trusted community partners who build relationships with youth, defuse conflict before it escalates, and provide alternatives to violence. These same partners now face staff layoffs, program shutdowns, and a deep uncertainty about the future — all at the expense of the over 2 million children in our state, many of whom already struggle to access the support systems they need and deserve.

The ripple effect of this decision cannot be overstated. In an era where school safety, youth mental health, and community stability are top priorities, pulling this funding midstream undercuts years of progress and destabilizes essential networks of care. For many young people in New Jersey, CBVIP programs serve as one of the few safe spaces outside of school and home — places where they are seen, heard, and supported.

As a statewide organization committed to advancing quality out-of-school time (OST) programming, NJSACC stands in solidarity with our CBVIP partners. We know firsthand how deeply interconnected youth development, public safety, and equitable access to resources truly are. This is not just a funding issue — it's a youth justice issue.

**We urge our state and federal leaders to explore every possible avenue to restore and protect this funding. Our communities cannot afford to lose these programs. Our youth cannot afford to be overlooked.**

### **What You Can Do**



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- **Contact your elected officials** and urge them to advocate for the restoration of federal CBVIP funding. Find your representatives here: <https://www.congress.gov/members>
- **Share your story** or how these programs have impacted your community — your voice matters.
- **Support local organizations** impacted by the cuts, like the [Newark Community Street Team](#), which works tirelessly to reduce violence and support youth through community engagement, trauma-informed services, and prevention strategies.

Now more than ever, we must work together to invest in the systems that lift young people up — not take them away.

## Become an Advocate for Afterschool: Participate in the Afterschool for All Challenge

The Afterschool for All Challenge is coming! On **Tuesday, May 6**, we're joining advocates nationwide to remind Congress why afterschool and summer programs are essential for youth, families, and communities. [Save the date](#) and use the [Challenge webpage](#) on May 6 to contact your members of Congress and encourage others to take action.

**Here's how you can prepare and participate:**

### 1. Join the Afterschool Alliance for a special edition of the [Policy Pulse on May 2](#) at noon ET

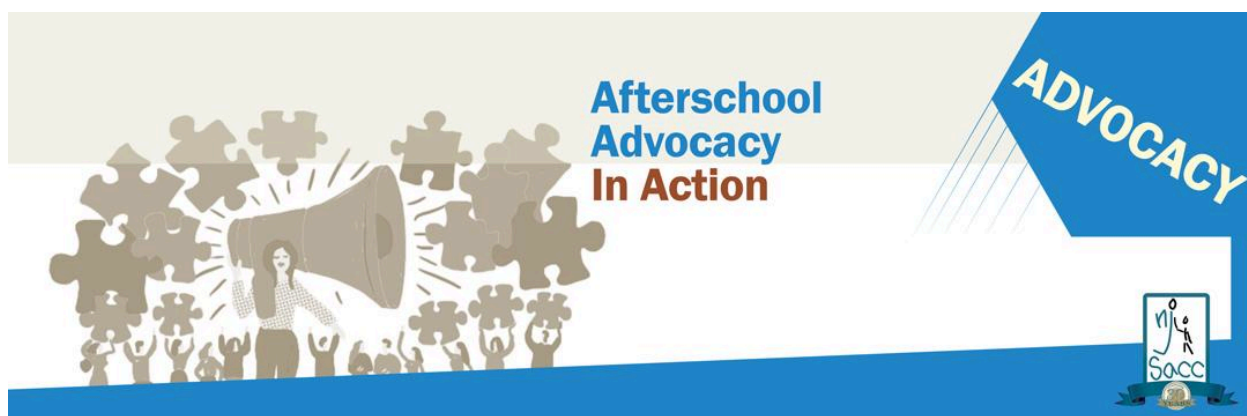
Get the latest federal policy updates and tips for participating in the Challenge from Erik Peterson, Senior Vice President of Policy, and Shaun Gray, Senior Manager of Design and Events. Be sure to submit your questions in advance.

### 2. Take Action on May 6

Call or email your members of Congress to share the impact of OST programs in your community. After sending your message, share your advocacy on social media and inspire others to raise their voices for afterschool.

Together, we can ensure every young person in New Jersey has access to safe, enriching, and equitable out-of-school time opportunities. Let's build the future of OST—one action at a time.





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### 3. Help get the word out!

Use the sample posts in the [Digital Action Toolkit](#) to promote the *Challenge* now and to tag and thank members of Congress for supporting afterschool and summer programs on May 6.

#### **Federal Clawback of Mental Health Funds Undermines NJ Progress in Supporting Youth**

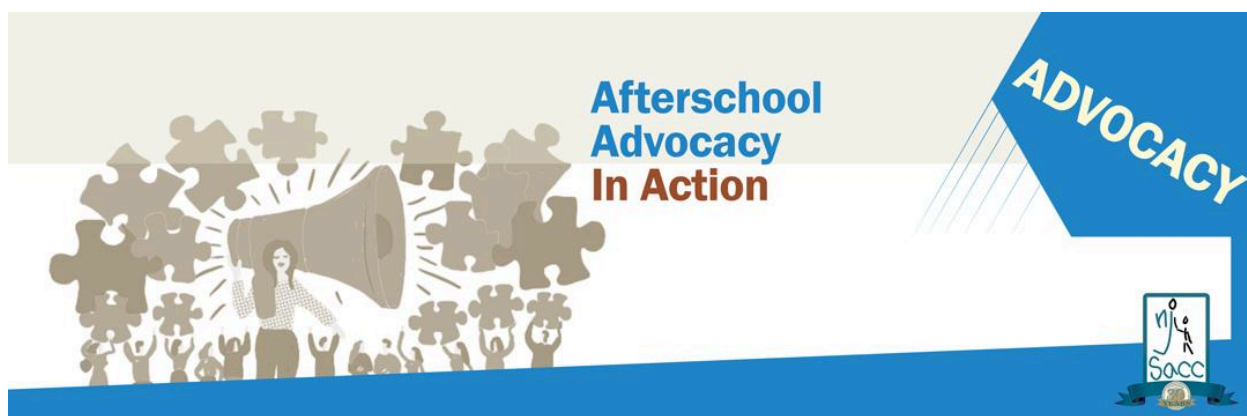
At NJSACC, we know that strong out-of-school time programs work hand in hand with schools to support the whole child—and that means prioritizing mental health as much as academic achievement. That's why the recent announcement that the U.S. Department of Education will claw back nearly \$1 billion in federal funds from the School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMH) Grant Program and its companion Mental Health Screening in Schools (MHSS) initiative is deeply troubling.

This decision threatens to dismantle critical progress in school-based mental health services across the nation—and right here in New Jersey.

Earlier this year, New Jersey received a five-year, \$14 million federal SBMH grant to expand the presence of school counselors, psychologists, and social workers in schools with the highest needs. The state committed to matching those federal dollars with \$1 million annually, and local educational agencies (LEAs) were selected through a competitive grant process to launch and sustain these services.

The following New Jersey school districts were selected for this critical funding:

- **Bogota Public Schools**
- **Hackensack Public Schools**
- **Collingswood Borough Public Schools**
- **Gloucester Township Public Schools**
- **Cumberland Regional School District**
- **Union City School District**



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- **Perth Amboy Public Schools**
- **Jackson Township School District**
- **Pinelands Regional School District**
- **Hillside Township School District**
- **Union Township School District (Union County)**

Their inclusion in this program represented a meaningful step forward in addressing the urgent and growing youth mental health crisis in our state.

Let's not forget: even before the pandemic, up to 1 in 5 children in the U.S. experienced a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder. The 2021 U.S. Surgeon General's report called youth mental health a national crisis. In response, New Jersey leaders acted swiftly and comprehensively, investing in interagency collaborations, screening tools, and a workforce pipeline to increase both the number and diversity of school-based mental health professionals.

Undoing this funding now pulls the rug out from under the school districts and professionals who have already begun building the systems and supports our students' needs. Moreover, it risks the success of our state's broader strategy to expand access to care and cultivate a diverse pipeline of well-trained providers—something our communities of color and underserved districts cannot afford to lose.

This isn't just a policy reversal. It's a setback with real consequences for real kids.

We urge federal leaders to reconsider this decision and reinstate these critical investments. At NJSACC, we remain committed to advocating for policies that protect and expand access to mental health supports for all New Jersey youth—in school, after school, and beyond.

Let's stand together for student mental health. The future of our children depends on it.