

# Universal Out-of-School Time & the District of Columbia's Public Health and Safety

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On December 4th, 2023, Washington D.C. Councilmember Matt Frumin proposed the Universal Out of School Time Amendment Act (UOSTA). The UOSTA aims to expand the development, funding, and accessibility of out-of-school time (OST) programming in D.C. and have universal OST programming available for every public school and public charter school student by 2035 ([Frumin, 2023](#)). OST programming includes before and afterschool programs, summer camps, and other supervised activities for youth when school is not in session.

When discussing the benefits of OST programming, conversations typically focus on the advancements these programs have on participants' academic and educational achievement, school attendance, social-emotional skills, behavior, and attitudes ([Afterschool Alliance, 2023](#)). Often, however, the public health and safety benefits that OST programs provide can be overlooked. Universal OST in the District can promote public health and safety by preventing youth from engaging in crime, dropping out of school, and abusing substances. As well as by supporting working parents and promoting racial equity among families and students in Wards 7 and 8. With Washington, D.C. Councilmembers having introduced the Universal Out of School Time Amendment Act, it is imperative that community members and other legislators understand how universal OST has the power to transform the entire D.C. community.

## PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY

Public health is centered on promoting, protecting, and improving the health of all people by preventing conditions that harm or reduce the quality of their lives ([American Public Health Association, n.d.](#)). While public health is commonly associated with disease prevention and vaccine efforts, public health also includes behavioral and environmental sciences work, such as influencing policy to address gun violence, bullying, and obesity ([John Hopkins, n.d.](#)).

Similarly, public safety aims to protect communities from potential threats and hazards that could compromise their well-being ([Goodwin University, n.d.](#)). Public safety plays a critical role in public health, as community members cannot fully thrive or engage in healthy behaviors unless they feel safe ([Let's Get Healthy California, n.d.](#)). Violence, or even the fear of it, can undermine community initiatives that promote public health and well-being, hindering overall community wellness ([Let's Get Healthy California, n.d.](#)).

## **THE UNIVERSAL OUT OF SCHOOL TIME AMENDMENT ACT**

Currently, a variety of OST programs exist in D.C., offering youth opportunities to engage in activities such as sports, special interest groups (like performing arts or band), homework support, STEM workshops, and more. However, many youth are unable to access these programs due to programming not being available in their ward or high costs. The UOSTA aims to have the District of Columbia expand its before-school, after-school, and summer programs by a minimum of 10% annually over the next eleven years ([Frumin, 2023](#)). The bill will address common barriers to OST access, including cost, accessibility, and racial and geographic disparities ([Frumin, 2023](#)).

Programming costs and availability will center around equitable access. Prices will be free or reduced based on students' individual circumstances. Priority access will be given to students who are at-risk, English language learners, low-income, involved with the criminal justice system, or receiving special education services. Additionally, geographic convenience will influence where programming is available so that all families, particularly in Wards 7 and 8, have access to OST programming ([Frumin, 2023](#)).

As of May 2025, the UOSTA has yet to have its first reading ([Bill 26-68, 2025](#)). While the proposed 10% annual increase in OST expansion for the next ten years, estimated to cost \$276 million ([Danylko, 2023](#)), may seem expensive, it represents a high-return investment for the community. Increased investment in universal OST programs will ultimately lead to long-term savings for taxpayers ([Afterschool Alliance, 2023](#); [National League of Cities Institute, 2020](#)).

## **REDUCING YOUTH CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION**

One of the driving forces behind the UOSTA is the rising rate of youth crimes, particularly violent youth crimes, in D.C. since 2020 ([Frumin, 2023](#)). Between 2023 and 2024, police arrested 2,000 youth; in 2024 alone, nearly 200 juvenile arrests were repeat violent crime offenders ([Segraves, 2025](#)). In response, the Mayor of D.C., Muriel Bowser, and Metropolitan Police Chief, Pamela Smith, announced the formation of a new police unit, the Juvenile Investigative Response Unit (JIRU) in April 2025 to focus specifically on responding to and preventing youth crime prevention and response ([Segraves, 2025](#)). This new unit intends to more effectively address youth-involved crime before it happens by using "data-driven

analysis to identify crime trends among juveniles and intervene before conflicts escalate into violence" ([DC.gov, 2025](#)). JIRU will also work to connect youth with necessary support services while ensuring accountability for those who commit serious offenses ([Metropolitan Police: Washington, D.C., 2025](#)). Universal out-of-school time programming has the potential to play a key role in supporting JIRU's mission of preventing juvenile offenses and breaking cycles of recidivism.

Research shows that high-quality afterschool programs effectively reduce and prevent youth crime as well as youth victimization by keeping students safe and engaged during peak crime hours ([Afterschool Alliance & MetLife Foundation, 2014](#) & [Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2019](#)). Acts of violent juvenile crime are five times more likely to occur after school, between the hours of 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. during the school week ([Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2019](#) & [National League of Cities Institute, 2020](#)). Lack of safe, structured spaces and opportunities for youth to meaningfully engage with others actively undermines public safety ([National League of Cities Institute, 2020](#)). One study found that "afterschool programs with mentoring and group counseling can decrease violent crime arrests by 44% and vandalism and weapons crime by 36%" ([National League of Cities Institute, 2020](#)). In addition to reducing and preventing youth crime, OST programs also help protect young people from becoming victims of crime ([Afterschool Alliance & MetLife Foundation, 2014](#)). According to data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), youth victimizations involving violent crime peak at 3 p.m. on school days. Youth victimization is twice as likely to happen between the same hours that afterschool programs operate than later in the night ([OJJDP, 2022](#)). Universal OST programming plays an essential role in keeping youth safe, reducing youth crime rates, and preventing future offenses.

In addition to enhancing community safety, investing in OST programming also saves taxpayers money. Advocacy work often highlights that for every \$1 invested in afterschool programs, at least \$3 is saved in future costs ([Afterschool Alliance, 2023](#); [National League of Cities Institute, 2020](#)). Further analysis shows how substantial this financial impact is when looking at local figures. In D.C., it costs taxpayers around \$277,765 a year to incarcerate a single youth ([Justice Policy Institute, 2014](#)). In contrast, it costs around \$2,500 to send one child to a high-quality D.C. afterschool program for a year. ([Danylko, 2023](#)). Over 100 students could participate in OST programming in the District for the price it takes to incarcerate one youth.

## **REDUCING DROPOUT RATES**

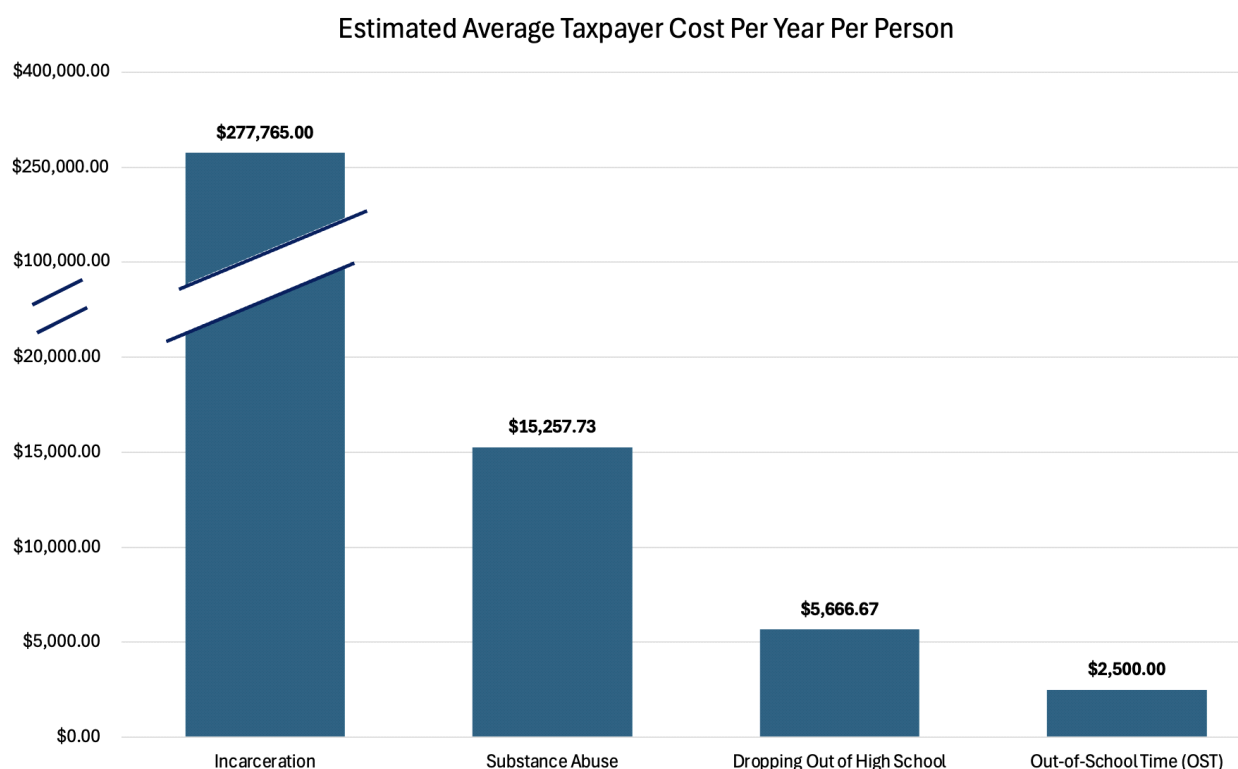
For decades, reports have shown that afterschool programs reduce student dropout rates ([Afterschool Alliance, 2023](#); [Cosden et al., 2004](#); [Havnes et al., 2011](#) & [National League of Cities Institute, 2020](#)). Combating high school dropout rates is critical, as students who leave school early are up to four times more likely to experience negative outcomes that impact public health and safety, including arrests, job loss, low wages, illicit substance abuse, and poor health ([Lansford et al., 2016](#)). Estimates suggest that when comparing high school

graduates to those who did not graduate, the average individual who did not graduate high school costs the economy around \$272,000 over their lifetime ([National Center for Education Statistics, 2020](#)). This cost accounts for lower tax contributions, increased involvement in crime, and greater reliance on public assistance programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), and housing assistance ([Justice Policy Institute, 2014](#) & [National Center for Education Statistics, 2020](#)). Assuming the average person works for 48 years ([Ghilarducci, 2021](#)), we can estimate that taxpayers spend around \$5,666.67 per year for each individual who did not complete high school. Comparing this price to the cost of OST for one student a year, District taxpayers could potentially save around \$3,166 per student a year by supporting universal OST access. Additionally, lowering dropout rates impacts student achievement, which increases the likelihood of students pursuing higher education, and improves their chances of making higher lifetime earnings ([Havnes et al., 2011](#)), further highlighting the strong return on investment that OST programs provide.

## **REDUCING SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Substance abuse is another costly public health issue that OST programs can help mitigate. The most recent report conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that over 9% of youth ages 12 to 17 in the District struggled with substance use disorder in the past year ([SAMHSA, 2024](#)). As of 2023, teenagers in D.C. were 11.94% more likely to have used drugs in the past month compared to the average American teen ([National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 2023](#)). While youth experimentation with drugs does not always lead to addiction, recurring use and early substance abuse at a young age are correlated with the later development of substance use disorders ([NIDA, 2022](#)). Prevention is critical in combating youth and future substance abuse. Student participation in OST programming has been linked to decreases in youth tobacco, drug, and alcohol use, as well as drug selling ([Afterschool Alliance, 2018](#); [Tierney & Grossman, 2000](#)). One study found that youth substance use not only decreased when students were engaged in positive youth development programs, but also that participants were more likely to view drugs as harmful, contributing to long-term decreases in future use ([Kraemer et al., 2007](#)).

Substance abuse not only harms community members and their loved ones but also imposes a significant economic burden. Based on national estimates of substance abuse costs and prevalence, we can approximate that the average annual cost that a single person struggling with substance abuse will unintentionally impose on their community is around \$15,257.73 per year ([American Addiction Centers, 2025](#); [Lines, 2024](#)). These costs accrue from lost revenue (due to premature death and lost labor), substance-related crime (such as theft and violence), legal enforcement expenses (police calls, prosecution, incarceration, probation, etc.), and medical attention and treatment services ([Health Policy Institute, 2025](#) & [Gateway Foundation, 2025](#)).



## SUPPORTING WORKING PARENTS

Working parents frequently experience high levels of work-to-family conflict, which is a type of stress parents experience when faced with competing work and family demands ([Handelzaltsa et al., 2024](#)). These competing responsibilities, priorities, and energy demands working parents face often result in costly effects on their health, contributing to poor sleep, increased cardiometabolic risk, elevated stress levels, and a higher likelihood of depression and anxiety ([Chandler, 2021](#)). With work-to-family conflicts impacting around 90 to 95% of American parents and the intensity of this conflict worsening alongside growing work and caregiving demands ([Williams & Boushey, 2010](#)), it has become a public health concern that demands immediate attention ([Chandler, 2021](#)).

In a 2023 survey of D.C. parents, 84% said that afterschool programs help them keep their jobs, and 90% agreed that these programs provide them with peace of mind because they know their child is safe ([Afterschool Alliance, 2023](#)). Universal OST programming is a powerful, multifaceted solution to combating work-to-family conflicts many parents in the District face. It helps reduce many common stressors parents may have related to job security and concern for their children's safety and well-being. Reliable and accessible OST programming means parents do not have to worry about leaving work early, arriving late, their child being alone, or relying on unstable childcare arrangements. This support is especially important for single parents, parents in high-stress jobs, and families who face barriers to OST access due to cost or distance. Investing in universal OST would help

prevent parental health complications related to work-to-family conflicts while also advancing health equity among parents across the city ([Chandler, 2021](#)).

## PROMOTING RACIAL EQUITY

Examination of the return on investment and the public health and safety benefits that the UOSTA would bring to the District helps showcase how this proposed policy benefits all residents, either directly or indirectly. Beyond its broad benefits, the UOSTA also recognizes long-standing inequities linked to accessing OST programs in D.C. by prioritizing historically marginalized and underserved students. The UOSTA specifically focuses on expanding access for students in Wards 7 and 8, at-risk students, English language learners, students experiencing poverty, those involved with the criminal justice system, and students eligible for special education services ([Frumin, 2023](#)).

Nationally, children with lower household incomes and children of color face disproportionately fewer opportunities to access OST programming when compared to their higher-income and White peers ([America After 3PM, 2020](#)). D.C. is no exception. Families in Wards 7 and 8—where the majority of residents are Black and have lower median household incomes—have the highest reported concentration of students without access to OST activities ([Danylko, 2023](#); [D.C. Policy Center, 2023](#)).

Comparisons		
DC Ward	Median 2024 Household Income	Percent of Black Population as of 2024
1	\$120,010	21.15%
2	\$116,285	14.93%
3	\$147,968	9.13%
4	\$109,966	44.90%
5	\$98,326	49.26%
6	\$120,943	31.07%
7	\$49,814	88.67%
8	\$45,598	88.06%

Source: data from [DC Health Matters](#) (2024)

Parents and students in Wards 7 and 8 currently face disproportionate exclusion from OST opportunities, which has negative impacts for both their public health and safety and the larger D.C. community. The UOSTA has the power to address these racial and socioeconomic inequities by prioritizing equitable access to programming, both in terms of cost and availability, and by expanding OST programming options specifically in Wards 7 and 8.

## CONCLUSION

As the D.C. Council prepares to review the Universal Out of School Time Amendment Act, it is essential that community members, educators, parents, and advocates rally behind it. We have a powerful opportunity to transform Washington, D.C. into a community with improved public health and safety while supporting opportunities and equity throughout the District. Now is the time to make our voices heard. Call on your representative to prioritize this legislation, share your testimony, attend Council meetings, and join advocacy efforts. It is time to demand investment in out-of-school time programs that uplift our youth and strengthen our communities. Universal out-of-school time programming is not just a benefit to students; it is also an investment in the future of the entire District. Universal out-of-school time programming benefits the community as a whole and offers opportunities that could redefine Washington, D.C.

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