

April 3, 2023: We are grateful for the support of the Vermont House of Representatives for an appropriation of \$1.2 million this year. And as noted in the House budget, we look forward to this continued support for the next four years.

We, the undersigned, fully support an appropriation of \$4,800,000 in fiscal year 2024 for the Land Access and Opportunity Board to ensure baseline operations over the next four years.

The Sunrise Report from the Land Access and Opportunity Board states that in order for this Board to do their work, they require an annual baseline budget of \$1.2 million dollars. It is critical to ensure that this Board can continue its important work for the next four years and achieve future success by committing now to a total appropriation of \$4.8 million.

The LAOB was created by a group of community organizers dedicated to reparative frameworks for addressing continued marginalization and systemic oppression. As a state, we need to resource the work of the LAOB in a sustainable way that allows for future success and independence, and start to fulfill the equity goals laid out by the state of Vermont. There are folks ready to do the work, and they need continued and sustained support.

The original legislation presented a heavy lift of bringing this Board together, which was accomplished in the Sunrise Report, and now we need to shift power in decision-making to community members who are most affected, trust them to do this work, and move money into the community.

Supporting the LAOB is an opportunity to lift up and fulfill a commitment to equity in Vermont, and takes Vermont a step closer to equitable land access programming that puts land into the hands of those who have traditionally been subjected to marginalization. This work will build resiliency and safety in communities, ensuring that folks who will be most subjected to climate disaster are able to equitably access land and services. **We respectfully ask the Legislature to support the LAOB by appropriating \$4,800,000 in fiscal year 2024 for the LAOB to spend over the next 4 years.**

Signed,

350VT
ACORN

Adam's Berry Farm

American Farmland Trust

Another Way

Audubon Vermont

Boneyard Farm

Building A Local Economy (BALE)

Calabash Gardens

Center for an Agricultural Economy

Center for Whole Communities

Central VT Economic Development Corporation

Clean Yield Asset Management

Community Resilience Organizations

Conservation Law Foundation

Cooperation Vermont Community Land Trust

Cooperative Creamery

Disability Rights Vermont

Earth Matters--Bennington County Vermont

EmpowR Transformation

Ezil's Respite Farm & Sanctuary L3C

Middlebury College Food Studies Program

Fools Farm L.C.

FreeHer VT

Green Mountain Self-Advocates

Hanover Co-op Food Stores of VT & NH

Hunger Free Vermont

Intervale Center

John Graham Housing & Services

Khelcom Farm

Kunsi Keya Tamakoce

Land For Good

Larix Landscape Architecture Studio

Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op

MycoEvolve



Newfane Congregational Church

Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust

Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Ottawaquechee Land Protectors Association

Regeneration Corps

Rights & Democracy Vermont

Rural Vermont

South Hero Land Trust

Standing Stone Farm

Stowe Land Trust

Strix Consulting

SUSU commUNITY Farm

The Center for Grassroots Organizing

The Smiley Farm

The Vermont Releaf Collective

Vermont Center for Independent Living

Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights

Vermont Community Loan Fund

Vermont Conservation Voters

Vermont Council on Rural Development

Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

Vermont Farmers Food Center

Vermont FEED

Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition

Vermont Land Trust

Vermont Natural Resources Council

Vermont Racial Justice Alliance

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Jericho Vermont

Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Vital Communities

Waterbury Area Anti-Racist Coalition (WAARC)

White River NRCD

Windham County NAACP



Testimonials from Partner Organizations

“As a Collective of almost 300 BIPOC Vermonters around the state, our members intimately understand the barriers to accessing land and housing. Our state needs to make a definitive and explicit commitment to recognizing the added layers of hardship that marginalized people face when trying to navigate systems of wealth and power simply to have a place to live or farm. Fully funding the LAOB would be a powerful public statement of Vermont's priorities and values, and a unique opportunity for Vermont to lead our region and country in addressing historical inequity.”

-Samantha Langevin, The Vermont Releaf Collective, February 2023

“Land and Housing Access is perhaps the greatest issue in our state. We must act swiftly to ensure that Vermonters can stay here, work here, and crucially, build wealth, assets, and community. For centuries, marginalized communities have been pushed out and excluded from these opportunities, harming our state's economy and integrity as we kept these communities in poverty and dependence. This issue ripples out everywhere; climate, housing, workforce, education, wealth inequality, and healthcare. The LAOB -- if given the resources to do their job --will foster equity in our state's housing and land policies, balancing and solving persistent issues that favor certain Vermonters over others. We urge you to provide them with the resources they need to do their duty.”

-Michael Weiss, Rights & Democracy Vermont, February 2023

“Providing the LAOB with stable funding for the next four years is an important step to fulfilling Act 182's promise of removing barriers and increasing equitable access to housing, land, and land-based enterprises for historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Additionally, the work of the LAOB, and commitment from the state, will help fulfill key strategic goals and priority strategies from the state's 2021-2030 Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan. Making a multi-year funding commitment in FY24 would be a strong signal from the legislature that it is taking the long-view of addressing racial equity and dismantling structural racism.”

-Jake Claro, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, February 2023

“Rural Vermont recognizes land and housing access, security, tenure, and equity as critical needs which need to be addressed with more government intervention led by the communities most directly impacted, vulnerable, and historically marginalized. The LAOB is an existing, democratically developed, body which is working towards addressing these issues in this way. Providing it funding security for its initial years will provide it the space it needs to: equitably compensate those involved, to continue to develop its systems of management and personnel and relationships with other instrumentalities of the state, to continue to grow its relationships with the stakeholders it seeks to serve and include, and to develop a research base and structures to support directing grants and funding to the communities it serves. Rural Vermont strongly urges the legislature to support this supplemental appropriations request.”

-Graham Unangst-Rufenacht, Rural Vermont, February 2023

“The Waterbury Anti-Racism Coalition (WAARC) supports the call for funding the Land Access and Opportunity Board (LOAB) because we believe that it is critical to center the most marginalized in our community as we face the ongoing housing crisis. We have supported the creation of the LAOB from the beginning because the idea and advocacy for the board was created and led by multi-racial community organizers who have done the work to bring the voice of Vermont constituents into the legislative process. And, now that the board has been formed, they have delivered on what has been asked of them in the SunRise report. We have confidence that if this board is funded, they will continue to make meaningful progress toward creating opportunities for land access and housing for the most marginalized in our community.”

-Steering Committee, Waterbury Anti-Racism Coalition, March 2023

“Vermont's population is estimated to be 94% white. This is no mistake. Institutional racism, chattel slavery and eugenics perpetrated by white lawmakers and citizens have ensured that Black, Indigenous and People of Color have not been safe to live or thrive in this state. The work of the Land Access and Opportunity Board is a step toward healing and justice for groups that have historically suffered at the hands of those in positions of power. Voting to continue to fund this board is the bare minimum Vermont's legislative committees can do. We respectfully ask the Legislature to support the LAOB by appropriating \$4,800,000 in fiscal year 2024 for the LAOB to spend over the next 4 years.”

-Kenya Lazuli, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, March 2023