

State Youth Council – Introductions and Discussion

Respectfully submitted to the House Education Committee
By Nicole Miller, Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool, Inc.
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March 29th, 2023

Thank you for inviting the State Youth Council and for listening to their thoughts. My name is Nicole Miller, Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool, and I live in Burlington.

Vermont Afterschool is thrilled and grateful to work with the VT Department of Health and the Youth Services Advisory Council (YSAC) to support the State Youth Council. This has truly been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had in my 17-year career in afterschool and youth development, as we see youth having the opportunity to weigh in on and share recommendations with the Legislature and Governor.

That said, the testimony shared by Council members does not reflect that of Vermont Afterschool, as our role is only to support the Council's functions, with the assistance of the Youth Services Advisory Council and the Vermont Department of Health, including:

1. Develop application for Statewide Youth Council;
2. Recruit youth for Council membership; disseminate application and information about the opportunity to be involved;
3. Receive incoming applications and answer questions from applying/interested youth;
4. Review applications and choose the initial 28 youth to serve on the Council;
5. Provide tech or tech devices for youth to be able to connect virtually;
6. Provide opportunities and facilitate trainings to build skills around youth leadership and/or specific public health priority areas [i.e. youth social emotional wellness];
7. Provide training to the Council on general State policies and formulating policy proposals;
8. Coordinate and co-facilitate Council meetings with youth;
9. Act as point of contact for the youth members; assist with meeting scheduling, logistical support (this may include being in contact with youth about attending Council meetings);
10. Participate as a member of the guiding subcommittee of YSAC; and
11. Pay Council members

There were 200 applicants for the 28 appointee spots, representing each of Vermont's counties, and a wide range of ages (11-18), lived experiences, identities, perspectives, concerns, interests, and engagement in leadership opportunities.

As you've heard, the Council members are passionate and eager to see this Council come to life. They have many of the same concerns of those living in Vermont – mental health for themselves, their peers, and community members at large; climate change; the urgency to become a more equitable and just society; education; ensuring young people have a voice and leadership opportunities; and more. Through thoughtful questions and ideas, they treat each other with kindness, seek to understand differences, and push those of us working with the Council to ensure we're doing everything we can to

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support them. We've taken our time to create a youth-driven space to ensure that these young people have the best opportunity to be active, engaged, connected, and heard – while not censoring their opinions.

To date, the State Youth Council has met four times. A kickoff meeting was held in Montpelier on Tuesday, December 13th; and virtual meetings have been held roughly twice per month beginning in January.

- The first meeting primarily served as an opportunity to start creating relationships, discuss partnership and productive relationships, examine their identities, build individual to collective core values, and explore leadership role models.
- The second focused on starting to understand how a bill becomes a law and Council logistics.
- The third included solidifying subcommittee interest, forming the executive committee, and choosing a chair.
- The fourth meeting was the first time the subcommittees met, and they focused on topics they are interested in within their subcommittee area.
- Subsequent meetings have been either subcommittee or whole Council meetings, supporting the members as they move forward.

Youth are compensated for their time and travel expenses as indicated in the language of [Act 109](#). They will continue to meet approximately every other week, alternating between whole committee and subcommittee meetings.

We are grateful for your support in this important step forward for Vermont, and hope that the General Assembly will continue encouraging the State Youth Council during this initial phase and beyond.

For Friday AM:

Good morning, my name is Nicole Miller, Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool. Thank you for inviting the State Youth Council and for listening to their thoughts. I'm here this morning with several members of the Council – Jaxon, Jeremiah, Harmony, and Jasper, and my colleague, Brianne Smith, the point person for the Council members.

We are thrilled and grateful to work with the VT Department of Health and the Youth Services Advisory Council (YSAC) to support the State Youth Council. This has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had, as we see youth having the opportunity to weigh in on policies and share recommendations with the Legislature and Governor.

That said, the testimony shared by Council members does not reflect that of Vermont Afterschool, as our role is only to support the Council's functions, with the assistance of the YSAC and the Department of Health, including:

- Recruiting potential members and developing an application;
- appointing initial members of the Council;
- technology support, devices, and other needs related to accessibility;
- training in leadership and how a bill becomes a law;
- coordinating and co-facilitating Council meetings, and logistic support;
- and compensation for Council members as directed in Act 109.

There were 200 applicants for the 28 appointee spots, representing each of Vermont's counties, and a wide range of ages (11-18), lived experiences, identities, perspectives, concerns, interests, and engagement in leadership opportunities.

As you'll hear, the Council members are passionate and eager. They have many of the same concerns of others living in Vermont – mental health for themselves, their peers, and community members at large; climate change; the urgency to become a more equitable and just society; education; ensuring young people have a voice and leadership opportunities; and more. Through thoughtful questions and ideas, they treat each other with kindness, and seek to understand differences. We've taken our time to create a youth-driven space where these young people can be active, engaged, connected, and heard.

To date, the Council has met four times. A kickoff meeting was held in Montpelier on Tuesday, December 13th; and three virtual meetings in January and February.

We are grateful for your support in this important step forward for Vermont, and hope that the General Assembly will continue encouraging the State Youth Council during this initial phase and beyond. Thank you.

Jaxon, Jeremiah, Harmony, and Jasper