

Jasper Lorian

Hello. My name is Jasper Lorian and I live in Washington County. I am a student, an activist, and a member of the Vermont State Youth Council.

Thank you for having me.

I'm very excited to be here in front of the house committee on education for several reasons. First, Representative McCann is my AP Stats teacher. During her election season, I spoke with her quite a few times about her plans for what she would do in office. She has a strong vision and a terrifying ability to get things done, so I know that she will be doing a lot of really amazing work on this committee.

Secondly, I believe that education, and this committee in particular, will be integral to so much of the work that we will be doing on the State Youth Council.

The education system is central to every aspect of our lives. School is where youth flourish and find themselves, but it is also where we wither and die. The work that you do and the policies that you put in place can decide which of those outcomes a student will face.

H.293 laid out five committees, Youth Voice, Education, Equity and Anti-Racism, Climate Change, and Youth Mental Health, as the focus of this council. Education is central, or at least will heavily impact, all five of these focuses.

Some are more obvious than others; the state youth council education committee is self-explanatory and of course one of the most prominent places that we need more youth voice in is education.

But even SYC committees like climate change are heavily affected by our education system. What we teach about the climate affects the actions of a whole generation, and our schools often have a significant carbon footprint themselves.

As for equity and anti-racism - so many issues of inequity are evident in schools, and so many solutions to race, wealth, and gender inequality start at the school level.

But I want to focus on my committee, the youth mental health committee.

We are facing a mental health crisis in our state, especially in our youth.

Over the last three years, 40 Vermonters ages 0-24 have committed suicide.

Between March 2020 and March 2022, MEDA, a Massachusetts-based inpatient facility that treats a large amount Vermont eating disorder patients, reported an increase in admittance of over 700%

Youth in Vermont have the highest suicide morbidity rate, including hospitalizations for attempted suicides and intentional self-harm, and reports of suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, and so many other mental health issues are rising rapidly every year.

As someone who has lost people I love to suicide and who knows so many people who are struggling with a myriad of mental health issues, I truly believe that, through legislation, our schools can hold a significant portion of the solution to these problems.

I hope that we can be a part of that.

Thank you.

Jeremiah Watson

Dear House Education,

My name is Jeremiah Watson. I am a biracial Christian male and am a compassionate, trustworthy, and dedicated person. My mentors include my parents, religious figures, coaches, and teachers, such as Rep Terri Williams, Former Rep Vicki Strong, her husband, Nate Strong, who is my pastor, my Mom, and my Grandma. They have helped shape and forge the person I am today. Most would identify me as a humble, strong, sincere, intelligent, and self-motivated young man.

It is my pleasure today, to talk with you about my experience on the youth council. Thank you for inviting me in and for allowing me to be here! I greatly appreciate everyone who made this opportunity for the youth council possible!

Each member of this council has a certain role. We are all on one of 5 committees: youth voice, Education, Climate change, Anti-racism and equity, and mental health. I represent Vermont youth in education. I am a school choice advocate, and I plan to represent Vermont youth by making school choices statewide so that Vermont youth can go to any school in which best meets their needs.

I applied to be on the youth council because I wanted to make a difference. I want to fundamentally change the way that young people see Vermont, and make our state a more prosperous, exciting, and attractive place. Our beautiful mountains, Fish, Wildlife, and rural forests are wonderful places to be. To make the dream of being a Vermonter a reality, we must find a new way to change how Vermont youth think about our state by providing more opportunities, individual freedom, an environment that promotes business, and a wealth of choices in prosperous education.

School choice has brought me opportunities that otherwise would not have been possible. I hope the legislature continues to support students like me by making school choices available to everyone in our state. Whether private, independent, or public, each school meets the needs of a certain group of students. This embodied the true strength of diversity in ideas and thought. Join me in celebrating it by supporting universal school choice. When we allow students and parents to have a choice of schools, all can be more successful with their goals, aspirations, and talents.

Each of us brings a unique perspective to this council. We all are extremely supportive and respectful of each other, whether we agree or disagree, and we enjoy being ourselves. The State Youth council is made up of independent-minded individuals who all have a passion for the future of the State of Vermont. I am so proud of the legislature for making my experience

possible. School choice has been a major factor in my success in Vermont. I would be happy to take any questions about my Vermont experience. Thank you!

Harmony Devoe

I am Harmony Belle Devoe, and I live in Warren, Vermont. I joined this council because I believe that students should be educated on how their actions and words affect others, and how to stand up for themselves against racism, sexism, queerphobia, and ableism.

The State Youth Council has made me feel empowered and hopeful for Vermont's future, and it is comforting to meet other youth like me, who care about our world, as I often feel like many youth brush it aside.

Using derogatory terms has become a sad norm among youth, which is not acceptable. Each day at my school, I see or hear at least one insolent remark and/or action.

I'm not sure if kids don't know, or don't care that this is not okay, but it isn't. When I hear racist comments, I myself, am slightly uneducated, and am unsure what to say, and regretfully, I become a bystander some of the time. This is why it is so important for children to learn how to stand up for themselves and others.

There have also been multiple times where myself or another has been threatened to be, or has been sexually harassed, and the people who carry out these actions are most likely uneducated about the impact of their actions, and the victims of these actions may grow up not realizing they can stand up for themselves and call these people (and possibly institutions) out, as can witnesses.

Youth need to be provided opportunities to learn how they can address racism, sexism, and harassment, when it occurs. School policies and procedures must be in place to provide youth avenues to address these concerns and incidents. Also, education around these topics must be present and thorough in schools, so youth well understand how their actions can affect others.

In addition, almost everyday, I see or hear someone showing that they don't care about the environment, and this breaks my heart a little each time, because Earth is our home, and our future. People often leave their trash outside on the ground, leave lights or faucets on, waste food, and say things like, "Why should I care? The Earth and us are all going to die anyway." If people are more educated on the importance of taking care of our planet, our home, we, and our future, would be much better off.

Thankfully, I have grown up in an open-minded, activism-driven family, and I have been educated on many topics like this, and the immense positive impact caring about people, the planet, and the greater good can create.

I also have been brought up to have a love for learning, and I believe that schools should try to instill this in every student, to create life-long learners. I believe there should be more hands-on lessons in schools to raise awareness on creating equity, the environment, the importance of their actions and care, and how to stand up for themselves and others. I would like to see every teacher be obligated to include at least five lessons about change making each semester.

I also believe that parents and guardians should be encouraged to teach their children about these topics, and to have discussions as families, and take action together. The events I've experienced have led me to strongly believe in the power of educating youth about how to use their actions and words to benefit the world, and I hope your committee and our council can work together to achieve this.
Thank you.