

Hello, thank you for having me. My name is Jasper Lorien and I live in Washington County. I am a student, an activist, and a member of the Vermont State Youth Council.

I found out about the council a few months after H.293 was enacted through Una Fonte, a member of the student advisory for the creation of the Youth Council.

She was a counselor when I attended the Governor's Institute on Global Issues and Youth Action. Throughout the week-long program, she spoke about her work on the bill with so much devotion and passion. She had such a powerful vision for the future of the Youth Council and when she asked me to apply I felt beyond honored that she saw me as a part of that future.

But in all honesty, I'm a pretty cynical person. I know that it is never easy for people in power to let new people into the political process. It's hard for them to listen unconditionally, not just when it suits them. I know that we, as youth, are so often overlooked. I was really not interested in just becoming a political pawn.

But when I read the bill and began speaking to more people involved in its creation a lot of those worries were dispersed. It became very clear that it had significant youth input and that there were so many legislators that wanted to work - to truly work - with us.

All five of the standing committees were well thought-out and every single goal in the legislation was personally important to me. Many of them were on issues that I had worked on in the past.

Specifically, the focus on youth mental health was extraordinarily significant to me.

Over the last three years, 40 Vermonters ages 0-24 have committed suicide. Among them were two of my friends - two people that meant everything to me.

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

Youth in Vermont have the highest suicide morbidity rate, including hospitalizations for attempted suicides and intentional self-harm.

Beds in hospitals and psychiatric facilities are full. There are unconscionable wait times for psychiatrists and therapists. The cost of diagnosis and treatment disenfranchises already vulnerable Vermonters.

Reports of suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, and so many other mental health issues are rising rapidly every year.

This is a monolith of a problem. As an individual, I worked with my school district and local community, members of the state government, and several charities to make a difference, but doing it alone was beyond daunting.

But with the youth council, I feel different. I decided to apply because I saw its potential to become a meaningful vehicle for change in a way that I, as an individual, never could.

I am only one person, but with an entire committee focused on mental health, I know we will make lasting, statewide change for the better.

There are 28 of us, each with different ambitions, passions, strengths, and goals, but we all are here because we want to make a difference.

I am so incredibly confident that we will.

Thank you.