

## Testimony for Vermont Tourism Day

Jan. 15, 2020

Presented to the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

Good morning –

Both athletes in that video – Emily and Kyle – are from the Boston area. Tom and Felicia are employees in Vermont. That video IS Vermont – people who come here to play and recreate and enjoy the natural beauty of the state – and the people who live and work here for those same reasons.

Chairman Marcotte, Vice Chairwoman O’Sullivan and members of the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development:

My name is Kim Jackson and I am the communications and marketing director for Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports. I moved to Vermont nearly 25 years ago to work as the communications director at Killington Resort. I stayed, met and married my husband; we are raising our family in Bridgewater Corners in the Killington and Woodstock communities, and I have remained, for those 25 years, both employed and residing in the tourism arm of Vermont.

Take a moment to think about what you love to do. Skiing, hiking, biking, reading, golf, scenic drives. Now, imagine you couldn’t do what you’re passionate about. And even worse, when your family and friends took a ski vacation, went camping, learned a new sport like mountain biking or rock climbing – you couldn’t be a part of that because of your abilities.

For more than 30 years, Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports has been offering sports and recreational adventures to out-of-state visitors year-round. People with physical, developmental, cognitive, and emotional/behavioral disabilities have the opportunity to create lasting memories and share their passions for the outdoors – which of course, Vermont is famous for – with their family and friends.

Nearly 500 volunteers – half residing in Vermont and the other half from out of state – are trained to lead and guide lessons and adventures year-round on the snow, on Vermont’s waterways, hiking trails and more. Our participant demographic is similar, with half of our athletes and their families traveling from out of state to recreate with us. We utilize 20 or more interns a year - due in part to the funding of our intern program through the Vermont Department of Labor.

We offer more than 3,000 adaptive adventures, outings and retreats annually. In addition, we have three major fundraising events – the Vermont Adaptive Charity Ride with recreational road cycling, a gravel grind and festival; the Vermont 100 Endurance Race; and the Vermont 50 Ultra Run and Mountain Bike Race – collectively bringing 2,000 participants, plus their family and friends, to the state in June, July and September – and they spend and contribute to our economy.

Vermont Adaptive has expansive reach across the entire state including:

- Skiing and snowboarding at seven partner ski resorts throughout Vermont
- Ice and rock climbing in Chittenden and Rutland Counties
- Partnering with Vermont State Parks and use multiple parks throughout the state
- Partnering with Vermont Mountain Bike Association to build accessible trail networks
- Partnering with Green Mountain Club to build accessible privies and shelters on the Long Trail
- Collaborating with multiple sponsors who support our programs and mission including Ski Vermont, Darn Tough socks, Cabot Cheese, 802Cars, Turtle Fur, Nokian Tyres, Bag Balm, and AARP Vermont
- A fleet of vehicles and trucks to bring programming into communities across the state
- Two traveling mountain bike fleets, the only traveling adaptive mountain bike programming in Vermont

Today, adaptive sports is mainstream, and it’s a competitive market. People have options of where to go to recreate – from small community adaptive programs to larger organizations, to nationally recognized programs like Vermont Adaptive. We compete for market share with Western adaptive sports organizations on a national level. And yet we are

a gas tank away from roughly a quarter of the nation's population residing in major metro cities and must encourage these people to travel to Vermont instead of hopping on a plane.

In 2011 we built a brand new, \$1.3 million year-round, state-of-the-art adaptive sports facility at Pico Mountain. Our out of state donors from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and beyond - who support our programs - helped us raise the money to create this facility. As a result, participation in our programs has tripled at this one location.

This spring, we will break ground at Sugarbush Resort on our second adaptive sports center - and again - with out of state donors funding the majority of this \$2 million facility. Our third facility of this permanent homes campaign will be built somewhere on the Burlington waterfront in the next few years.

People from out of state support our programs and facilities. We raise millions of dollars to build these centers for participants, athletes and their friends and families to come to Vermont - BUT with funding that comes from individuals and grants that are primarily from out of state. Contrary to perception, there is no funding arm or umbrella that financially supports Vermont Adaptive's programming. So we rely on alternative sources of funding through partners and sponsors like the ones mentioned earlier. Imagine what we could do if we had more tourism dollars supporting the passion for Vermont and its outdoors?

This is a glimpse at Vermont's identity. But if we don't share Vermont's brand - the "who" of the state - the stories - then we risk losing more of our market share to other New England states as Vermont's promotional funding declines. My perception has always been that Vermont leads the way in tourism here in New England and was shocked to learn that Vermont has decreased its investment in this area. And according to U.S. Traveler Association, we now rank fifth out of six New England states for visitor spending growth over the last five years.

In my field, storytelling and communications do not produce direct ROI like lodging or restaurants might. But this is just one example of what you get when we share our story and encourage others to come to Vermont: someone like Samir, who loves Vermont for hanging out and having fun while learning.

Without increased investment, the full economic potential of the tourism industry - which includes organizations like Vermont Adaptive - is limited. We wouldn't have the depth and quality of programming that we have without the overarching storytelling, identity and branding from Vermont Tourism, which keeps Vermont top of mind in our out-of-state markets. Vermont Adaptive is ahead of the curve because of an amazing staff who understands the value the organization brings to the state.

Vermont Adaptive is an anomaly. We don't quite fit into one recreation bracket or umbrella. There is no direct chain linking us to one department in the state so we're unlike most of the groups here today - any dollars allocated to any state partners like Ski Vermont and the Department of Tourism - that we benefit from in an indirect way. We are here today fighting for our partners because without them, we have no other channels to reach other markets. We must continue to have a loud voice for this state. This is why we need an additional \$500,000 added to the existing tourism budget. Without the state's messaging our own voice will be muted.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Kim Jackson  
Director of Communications and Marketing  
Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports  
802-786-4991 ext. 24  
[pr@vermontadaptive.org](mailto:pr@vermontadaptive.org)