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RE: H.477
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Thank you Chair Briglin and committee members for accepting testimony on H.477, The Vermont Equity and Infrastructure Act, and for taking the time to hear from youth voice. My name is Emma Harter, I am a senior at Montpelier High School and an organizer for the Vermont Youth Lobby. The reason I contacted this committee was to relay a serious concern for the prosperity of our state, the future of all Vermonters, and the vitality of our natural environment.

We are here today in solidarity with many thousands of other young people around the globe who are calling on elected officials to take the climate crisis more seriously. We request that you act as if our lives depend upon your policy decisions - because they do.

We are sure that you are well aware that Vermont is not on track to meet its climate goals. We should be well-below our 1990 greenhouse gas emission levels by now. Yet, this is not the case. In Vermont, climate pollution is up 16% since 1990 and increasing at an accelerated rate.

To correct this, and to ensure a more equitable future, we want Vermont policymakers- like you- to honor the commitments you have made to the Paris Climate Accords and in the Vermont statute.

In particular, we need you to pass H.477, the Vermont Equity and Infrastructure Act because it is the most ambitious, comprehensive climate legislation introduced so far this year, and it offers Vermont an opportunity to strengthen its economy, protect the environment, and address inequity.

Climate change is THE defining issue of our time, and we are at a defining moment. Currently, Vermont, along with the rest of the world, faces a future of irreversible environmental, economic, and humanitarian catastrophe. This is the truth that we, as a nation and as a state, have

neglected to recognize in policy for years. It is true that the youth of today have been **born into a world scheduled for failure**. It is TRUE that if we do not take drastic action today, adapting to the impacts of climate change will be more difficult and costly. *Vermont youth know that these truths are irrefutable.*

Every young person that is in this room today, and every young person you see tomorrow, inherited a global environment that has been disrespected and abused for generations; young people are the ones that have to live with the long-term effects of this abuse for the rest of our lives. This means that many of us will be subjected to life-threatening storms, floods, droughts, and the conditions they inflict, including disease, hunger, poverty, and violence.

The consequences of climate change on the economy will be felt among today's young people. According to a recent study, A 21-year old college graduate in the class of 2015, earning a median income, will lose over \$126,000 in lifetime income, and \$187,000 in wealth. The millennial generation as a whole will lose nearly \$8.8 trillion in lifetime income due to the economic effects of climate change.¹ Vermont is not immune to these economic consequences.

If we continue to disregard the prosperity of our natural environment, global warming will continue to worsen and we will witness the US economy shrink by as much as 10 percent by the end of the century.² I ask you, how do you think this will impact Vermont?

If you want an equitable future for the students sitting in front of you, and the young people outside of this room, we ask that you address the climate crisis with the seriousness that it deserves. Passing H.477 is a vital first step.

One of the most important qualities of H.477 is its inclusion and care for rural and low-income Vermonters.

¹ The Price Tag of Being Young: Climate Change and Millennials' Economic Future. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.demos.org/publication/price-tag-being-young-climate-change-and-millennials-economic-future>

² Gramling, C., & Hamers, L. (2018, November 28). Here's how much climate change could cost the U.S. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/climate-change-economic-cost-united-states>

I was born in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, in a rural town with only 300 residents, where I continue to live with one parent. However, for the past ten years, I have also lived in Montpelier with my other parent. This duality allows me to understand the ways in which we have failed, across the state, to fully protect the needs of our citizens and families.

My experience in rural Vermont has fostered in me an appreciation of the natural beauty of Vermont; the undisturbed forests and animals, clear lakes and fresh air. This experience has also taught me the challenges of living without adequate access to supports and services.

Vermont is a largely rural state, which means that citizens spend a great deal of time and money commuting. I know from my frequent commutes that this can be financially exhaustive and the effects environmentally disastrous. H.477 will raise the revenue to support rural transportation options like buses and trains. I know that this is needed desperately in my community. Without the benefit of public transportation, poverty and isolation are exacerbated.

A transition to more effective public transport is especially needed if we are to make the necessary, urgent, and drastic changes to escape our current climate crisis and promote equity throughout Vermont.

In my hometown of Westmore, Vermont in Orleans County, my family has lived in fuel poverty for my entire life. What this means for me, and countless other Vermonters, is that the cost to keep our house warm presents a significant financial burden for the entire family. While many Vermonters will find the image of tending to a wood-fire late at night a familiar one, there are many others who find the image of sleeping in outerwear, their winter coats and mittens, much more familiar. H.477 identifies this problem in ways that other proposed solutions have failed to. Weatherizing 25,000 low-income houses and installing 50,000 low cost-high efficiency heat pumps will give households in need an opportunity to dedicate more of their income to their children, education, food, and transportation.

Climate change is regressive and presents significant burdens to low-income citizens and families. Yet, with H.477 we can achieve economic fairness, intergenerational equity, and environmental justice.

I understand that today is crossover day, and decisions regarding the bills have been solidified in the minds, agendas, and schedules of legislators here at the Statehouse. However, I ask for you to consider what climate inaction represents to young people all over the world. I'll refer you to a quote from the youth climate activist, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Greta Thunberg, **"You say you love your children above all else and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes."**

I urge you to listen to the youth who have made their presence known here today. We want a future where Vermont is economically sustainable and liberated from environmental crisis. We need a future that ensures equity, and we need to begin our journey towards that now. We can be the pioneers of change. Passing H.477 will inspire the national movement that we need to protect and preserve our environment, our communities, and our very lives.

