

Hope Petraro
Organizer, Vermont Youth Lobby
Montpelier High School
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Thank you committee members for accepting our testimony on H.477 and, by doing so, working to uplift youth voice. My name is Hope Petraro, and I am a junior at Montpelier High School and a member of the Vermont Youth Lobby. I'm testifying today in support of the Vermont Equity and Infrastructure Act because we are in dire need of the comprehensive, pragmatic solutions to climate change that it offers.

The Vermont Equity and Infrastructure Act is not just about weatherization, electrifying our energy supply, lowering property taxes for low-income Vermonters, or investing in rural transportation. It is about creating sustainable, necessary solutions to pressing problems. H. 477 is about fighting for equity in combating what scientists have called "biggest global health threat of the 21st century".¹ H. 477 is about entrepreneurship, progress, and social justice, and transforming our economy so that Vermont can exercise the leadership and initiative required to ensuring the world can survive and thrive.

Moreover, the Vermont Equity and Infrastructure Act is a crucial aspect of how we as Vermonters can lead a transition to and keep our promise of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and a reduction in emissions. As of 2015, only 16% of Vermont's total energy consumption was powered by renewables.² To achieve our goal of 90% renewable energy by 2050³, Vermont needs to be building renewable energy infrastructure now and creating jobs in the clean energy sector. By prioritizing the Vermont Equity and Infrastructure Act, we could help redirect billions of dollars now spent on dirty fossil fuels to initiate a fully transformed clean energy economy in a fiscally responsible manner.

¹ "The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change." 28 Nov. 2018, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)32594-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)32594-7/fulltext). Accessed 15 Mar. 2019.

² "2016 Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan - Vermont Legislature." <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Executive-summary-for-web.pdf>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2019.

³ "About 90 by 2050 | Community Energy Dashboard." <https://www.vtenergydashboard.org/90-by-2050>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2019.

I did not grow up in Vermont. I was born and raised in New York City, but I lovingly and wholeheartedly call Vermont my home — in part for its natural beauty that climate change threatens. Yet, I was a stakeholder in Vermont’s response to climate change long before I moved here. I have been a stakeholder in Vermont’s climate change legislation from the moment I was born in Brooklyn, because we are all stakeholders in the actions of the world when the planet we know is dying, and the building blocks of our planet – its ice sheets, forests, and atmospheric and ocean currents – are being altered beyond repair. I am also the child of a single mother, and as someone who is in a low-income family, I know that Vermonters need the support the Vermont Equity and Infrastructure Act provides, especially in regard to investing in public transportation. I am painfully aware of the opportunities that are unavailable to low-income Vermonters, unavailable to myself, because we do not have adequate access to cars or public transportation. Navigating the world can feel like a slap in the face when you’re poor - it has felt that way to me. We need to provide support to low-income residents not only in living in an eco-friendly manner and in energy efficiency, but in the access to the world that transportation infrastructure provides.

H. 477 also means we can invest in weatherization, helping the most vulnerable Vermonters who bear the highest burden of energy costs. Overall, studies have shown that in our most rural counties in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, the average driver can save \$870 per year and cut carbon dioxide emissions by more than 3 metric tons per year by choosing an electric vehicle over a conventional sedan.⁴ This is an equity issue as well — many Vermonters spend over \$2,000 per year to heat their homes⁵ — and for those living in fuel poverty, this can equal 5-10% of their annual incomes, sourced by fuel oil and propane.

Corporations — oil companies like Shell and ExxonMobil — spent decades suppressing the ramifications of the very pollution and carbon emissions they prospered from. They knew long before the people did of “potentially catastrophic events” — like worldwide sea level rise, high enough to inundate entire low-lying countries; the “total disappearance of specific ecosystems or habitat destruction,”; or global changes in air temperature that would “drastically change the way people live and work.” Shell concluded, “the changes may be the greatest in recorded history.” And they were absolutely right.⁶

⁴ "Union of Concerned Scientists." <https://www.ucsusa.org/>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2019.

⁵ "Tips & Tools List | Efficiency Vermont." <https://www.encyvermont.com/tips-tools/list?tool-type=guides&cat=heating%2C+cooling+%26+ventilation>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2019.

⁶ "Shell and Exxon's secret 1980s climate change warnings - The Guardian." 19 Sep. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2018/sep/19/shell-and-exxons-secret-1980s-climate-change-warnings>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2019.

But it is 2019, and climate change is a secret no longer. Their studies were leaked, and the efforts of big business and corporate lobbying can no longer suppress science. Climate change is at the forefront of global conversation, and the eyes of the world — both now and in the future, of our children and our children's children — are watching. Climate change was kept secret by companies under the presumption that if we the people knew about it, we would do something to fight it. However, they were wrong: we know the risks climate change poses and the impact it is currently having, yet have abdicated ourselves from our responsibility of finding a solution to it. Just yesterday, for example, Vermont Democrats did not include climate change as one of their five priorities for the legislative session.

All around the world, tens of thousands of students in over one hundred countries and over thirty-five US states are forgoing their education simply because we want to survive. We understand that climate change is already affecting us and is a growing obstacle to ensuring every person in every community has the ability to live with stable weather patterns; to swim in and drink from clean, safe water; to breathe unpolluted air; to live free from forced migration; to have access to food; and to live free from civil conflict and disease. We understand that we're in the fight against climate change together, and because we understand political leadership around the world needs to prioritize climate change.

We as Vermonters cannot absolve ourselves from finding a solution until after we've fixed the problem. The solution to a problem as global, pervasive, and widespread as climate change is not as simple as we want it to be, and the modest advancements that have already been neglected in the Vermont legislature are not enough to meet our state commitments to affordability and efficiency — but they are certainly a step in the right direction, in part because our world's past record of inaction has exacerbated the effects of climate change. It is imperative that we act soon to prioritize combating climate change and making the switch to clean energy, infrastructure, and livelihood.

We've progressed through another legislative session without prioritizing climate change enough, but we can overcome apathy regarding climate change through a solution as pragmatic and tangible as H. 477. As I mentioned earlier, the world is watching us. Our next steps will affect our hometowns, our states, and generations around the world for hundreds of years to come. Thank you.