

Hello, my name is Alex Smart and I am a junior at Montpelier High School.

To begin, I ask that we all look into the future. 50 years from now, most of the stereotypically “old, white, politicians” will be gone. Instead of the household names we know of now, there will be names we have not even heard yet. There will be decisions that were made in 2020 that will impact these new leaders and this new adult population. Although it is hard to imagine the future, it is far more important to look ahead than back.

I am sure that the words “nothing about us without us” are not new to you. These words tell the story of a terrified and strong generation. The media tells another story, of teens who don’t care about anything but their phones and friends. But that is not true. The climate is changing at an alarmingly fast rate, schools are shooting grounds, and student debt has skyrocketed. The world that is being destroyed by the adults of today will have to be cleaned up by the adults of tomorrow. If there were 25 shootings in state-buildings in just a year, there would be rapid legislative action. When the majority of the people in our government were in college, a minimum-wage part-time summer job would pay for a year of college, without taking out any loans. The representatives have not grown up in a world where climate change could become a cause of human death.

The world of today is very different than the world even 20 years ago. Every new generation is faced with new struggles and new challenges that they must rise to. Across our country, students have marched and protested for many issues that we know could forever change our adult lives. The youth of today care, and we will be persistent in our quest for change. Allowing youth to have a say in the legislative action, through a state youth council, would give us a chance to actually change our futures, and give a perspective that not many adults have.

When I met the students who visited from Helsinki I marveled at how normal having a say in local government seemed to them. Of course, when I first heard that the government must legally have a youth perspective in order to pass anything regarding youth, I dreamed that it could be implemented in the US, even in Vermont. But the few people I brought it up with said it would be impossible. But, here we are, discussing the very thing that could change the lives of future adults.

One reason that this bill could be thought of as impossible might be the stereotypical expectation that teenagers are lazy and uncaring. However, if you look at the newspapers, students are marching, students are getting out the vote. Students are skipping school to fight for a planet because the adults won’t. We will fight for our future.

Another concern with bringing youth into the legislative process could be a fear of how we would react if bills or motions we purposed, were denied. Sure, it is possible that there would anger at the denial of certain bills or motions, but we are already angry. We are angry because we have a voice that is being smothered by a number. So, no matter how dejected or angry youth would be because of denial, at least we would have a voice. But, I believe that when youth are

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given the opportunities that are this critical, they will act like adults, while thinking like the future.

I know I am young. I have not been to college or lived alone. But I know the world I want to live in and the world I want all of the future generations to live in. It is not a world where climate change has taken its toll and children fear for their lives. The reason that a state youth council is so important now, is because adults aren't doing enough now. It is time for youth to take charge of their future. As a youth in Vermont, we are counting on you. Push this bill forward into becoming a reality, because there is a point of no return. And we are getting closer to it every day.