

Hi my name is Madison O'Brien and I am a senior at Springfield High School here in Vermont.

I would like to talk to you about the Vermont Youth Council bill.

We often hear that young Vermonters are one of our State's most important resources. I agree, we are the key to the future of our state. We will be part of the economy as it moves forward. We are part of what makes Vermont a wonderful place to live. We want and should be part of deciding what Vermont needs moving forward.

Young people have been involved in changing this country since its beginnings. From the Revolutionary war to the Women's Liberation and Civil Rights movement, LGBTQ struggles, fighting for Immigration and prison reform, the Occupy movement, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to Black Lives Matter and today's environmental movement just to name a few. All over the world, from Greece to Spain, Tunisia and Egypt, Canada and Chile, youth have been involved in making changes for their countries.

It is well past the time to get our ideas and resources into action and into the rooms where decisions are made. If we are to be part of the solution for a vibrant and growing Vermont then we need to regularly and formally be at the decision making table as equals with a voice in what will affect us all. **We need you to pass bill H 775 as a start to much more.**

I say to you all, legislators, educators and adult allies who want to support youth, here are just a few examples of ways you can be part of including us in what matters to us all:

Share Respect and Recognition. Start from a place of respect for young people's autonomy, opinions, desires, and actual capacity to take part in and lead in their communities and the state.

Work for our Representation at the tables and places where decisions are made. Make it regular and formal.

Engage in real talk. Don't be afraid to have open conversations with youth about systems of power, oppression, resistance, and liberation and ask for their opinions on how to make changes.

In conclusion, I urge you to pass the Vermont Youth Council bill but also to not stop with this bill. When we started working to create a youth center in our town we were encouraged to not use the word teen or youth when we talked with prospective partners and community members. We were told that it might have a negative bias. We heard that youth are often dismissed for a lack of engagement, or attacked for being disruptive, selfish, lazy or not caring. We decided to not listen to that advice and in fact decided to put Youth and teen front and center in our discussions because the fact is we do care, we do want to be part of the solution, we are the experts on our lives and how best to improve them. So I ask you today to keep working from your place of power to engage all Vermonters including youth, bring us to the table to be involved in the decisions that affect us all.

Thank you and we the youth of Vermont, look forward to working with all of you in the future.