

Testimony for the Committee on House Commerce and Economic Development  
Breck Knauff, Executive Director – Vermont Youth Conservation Corps  
May 11, 2021

#### Intro / Appreciation

- Breck Knauff / Executive Director, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps

#### Proposition

- Every young person, in exchange for serving their state, deserves a viable path to a meaningful career and continued education.
  - Service as a reflection of social responsibility
  - Notion of a compact, of shared responsibility – if young people are willing to step up and make Vermont communities, working landscape, economy stronger, Vermont will be here for them.

#### Request

- Have requested \$1.85M in funding to strengthen workforce development now and going forward

#### Coalition

- Representing not just VT Corps in this request of the legislature, but several other organizations
  - ReSOURCE, Vermont Works for Women, and AudubonVT
- For roughly half a year, we have been working to accomplish several goals, including:
  - Create more service and training opportunities for young adults
  - Enhance the quality of the training
  - Ensure access for all – this is an issue of equity
  - Collaborate more effectively
  - Create pathways between our organizations and to prospective employers
    - Examples of pathways are numerous –
      - Trailblazers (VWW) → VYCC Carpentry crew;
      - A YouthBuild participant (ReSOURCE) → Trailblazers
      - A Corps Member on VYCC Forestry Crew → Audubon VT
      - Of course, connecting alumni with employers
        - Every employer wants well-trained, reliable, collaborative employees.
        - Just as much as we complete projects, we train young adults to enter the workforce
    - Letter of Support from multiple VT leaders – businesses and organizations

- Strengths of Coalition
  - Reflect interest in not just running programs but in supporting and creating statewide systems. Vermont is program rich, but system poor
  - Values aligned
  - Models are similar
  - Strengths complement one another - examples
    - ReSOURCE – credentials
    - VWW – support and innovation for women and non-gender conforming participants – also work with employers to build culture that can be supportive of VWW graduates
    - VYCC – expertise in leadership development, technical training, and project completion
    - Audubon brings education and conservation expertise
  
- Use of Funds – multiple benefits
  - Immediate impact and benefits
    - We can put people to work immediately
      - Without these funds, there are positions we will not fill
      - Without these funds, there are programs we will not run
    - Increase compensation
      - Ensures equitable access – young person should not have to choose job with less training value b/c of economic status
      - Support training for critical industries
    - Enhance quality of training
      - Incorporate variety of training modules, workshops
  - Will ensure project completion
    - Carpentry and infrastructure
    - Water quality
    - Food security
    - Forestry
    - Outdoor recreation
    - Weatherization
    - Conservation and climate change
    - Outdoor education
  - Longer Term Impact
    - Enhance capacity and collaboration
      - Recruitment
      - Program integration
      - Partnerships with employers and state agencies

- Flow of Funds
  - These funds are included in letter Secretary of Administration, Suzanne Young sent Representative Hooper on May 4<sup>th</sup>, copying other legislative leaders (Page 8, 1<sup>st</sup> page of the appendix)
  - Funds are included in Senate priorities – H.439, page 3
  - VYCC has longstanding partnership with Department of Forest Parks and Recreation
    - At one point early in our history, we were actually part of FPR
    - As we do for other aspects of our work/partnership with FPR, will finalize agreement between VYCC and FPR. VYCC will then administer funds cooperatively with ReSOURCE, VWW, and AudVT

#### Final Thoughts

- Every young person, in exchange for serving their state, deserves a viable path to a meaningful and continued education.
- Dialogue discussing and comparing merits of investing in physical infrastructure and human infrastructure
  - We can do both.
  - This request gives us such an opportunity
- Thank you