

Dear Chair Stevens,

I understand that you and your committee have heard recent testimony on H.273: An act relating to promoting racial and social equity in land access and property ownership. This is an important bill, and one the Vermont Land Trust supports.

Rooted in Vermont since 1977, the Vermont Land Trust has protected over 635,000 acres, or roughly 11% of the private land owned in Vermont. Very few of these parcels are owned by people from groups that have been historically marginalized and oppressed. Much of that is due to historic racism, prejudice, wealth disparities, and land theft that H.273 references in its Legislative Intent and Findings.

As a land conservation organization, we grapple with that legacy and strive to repair past harms. H.273 moves Vermont in the right direction by creating the Land Access and Opportunity Fund. This is particularly important in farming where the high cost of land is the biggest barrier facing new or beginning farmers, particularly people who are Black, Indigenous, or from other Communities of Color.

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) has been an important partner in conserving farmland, which frees up capital and makes land more affordable for the next generation. In partnership with VHCB, we have helped hundreds of new and beginning farmers buy land and grow their businesses. We hope the committee recognizes the role of VHCB and considers adding language to H.273 that encourages coordination between this new Board and VHCB.

Another bill, currently in House Ways and Means exempts Vermont's recognized Indigenous Tribes from the statewide education property tax and the municipal property tax. H.556 is another bill we support. It creates opportunities for state-recognized tribes, none of which are federally recognized, to receive state tax benefits enabling them to reinvest in their communities—another way to recognize and repair past harms.

Thank you for your consideration and would be happy to answer questions or offer formal testimony should that be useful.

Thank you,

Abby White