

## Theresa Utton-Jerman

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**Subject:** Youth

Hello—My name is Virginia Burley. I live in East Montpelier. Thank you so much to the Vermont House and Senate Appropriations Committees for taking public testimony.

I have worked in Vermont for more than 20 years in a combination of youth-oriented fields - afterschool and summer learning, and substance misuse prevention. The fields are like the two sides of a coin, problems and answers to raising a generation of young people with promise. Attention to these issues is particularly crucial during the current crisis, when families are stressed and many of the supports provided to youth through schools and social programs are unavailable. I have also been closely following the cannabis legalization process, and am deeply concerned about the impact of normalization of another psychoactive drug on our youth.

One of the best ways to keep youth on a positive path is to steer them toward healthy, productive activities that allow them to engage in activities that make their world a healthier and safer place.

Afterschool, summer learning, and third space programs were a lifeline for underserved communities and working families before the pandemic; now they are more important than ever. Now is the time to invest in afterschool and summer learning programs.

I participated in the creation of the Youth Council and the Youth Bill of Rights. I fully support the Youth Council Bill that will be introduced any day now, as well as the appropriation request in the bill. A statewide youth council will provide a space where the input of youth is truly valued, not tokenized. Youth are capable decision-makers and collaborators who are eager to be engaged in our state's decision making processes. The creation of a Vermont Youth Council empowers youth across the state and will help to build a generation of innovators, leaders, creators, and change-makers.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope that you will join me in recognizing that young people make a better Vermont.

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