

RAD Staff Script

Lobby Day 2022

Thank you Chair Carr and members of the **House Energy and technology** committee for welcoming us today.

My name is **Tom Proctor** and I am the **Housing Justice Organizer** for Rights & Democracy in Vermont.

Before I begin, I wish to share a land acknowledgement with the committee:

"Rights & Democracy acknowledges the Mahican (in southern Vermont) and Abenaki peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Ndakinna (En-DAH-kee-nah), which includes parts of Vermont, New Hampshire, New England, and Quebec. As guests on the unceded territory of the Mahican and Abenaki peoples, we honor their ancestors, elders, and relations past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge that our nation has benefited from the uncompensated and exploited labor represented in the legacy of slavery and the present-day reality of migrant farmworkers."

Thank you.

Rights & Democracy, which we call RAD for short, and our sibling organization the Rights & Democracy Institute, were founded in 2015 on the theory of change that it takes people power, year after year, to make the kind of big, bold, long-term changes we want to see in this country.

Part of the theory of change is that it takes political infrastructure--in this case, a membership organization--to sustain the momentum necessary to do that work throughout and in between elections. RAD members and staff work on issues that matter to our communities, organize for policy change at the state and national level, and recruit and train a pipeline of progressive candidates to run for office.

Our members are from all walks of life: intergenerational, multicultural, activists, artists, organizers – but most importantly, passionate fighters for true social justice and meaningful change in our communities and across the state. We have chapters across Vermont and New Hampshire – look for us wherever you are.

This is what we know: our current systems are rooted in historic oppressions, deeply dysfunctional, and fragile. When those fragile systems break, Vermonters who have been systemically kept out of places of power are those most impacted.

Abenaki/Indigenous Persons, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA individuals, individuals with disabilities, senior citizens, New Americans/Migrant Community, youth/young Adults, poor/working poor are the people who carry the weight of policies and systems gone wrong. These individuals are nearly 80% of the Vermont voting population, are the least represented in our state government, and are in some cases

wholly invisible to those who enact the policies that can prove deadly to their communities.

Our mission is to bring people together to take action to build healthy communities and make the values of our communities guide the policies of our government. We are building a popular movement to advance rights and build a real democracy. We believe we can achieve a society where people earn a livable wage and have access to affordable health care, and where a progressive and equitable tax system supports an economy that protects the environment and human rights.

It is our pleasure to testify to you today and share our visions of collective liberation and a more just and vibrant Vermont.

Regionally, the Rights & Democracy Institute has joined forces with hundreds of organizations across New England to bring a shared agenda that amplifies the power and will of the people. Together, we have formed the Renew New England Alliance to push forward bold structural change across all six states. And today, we are thrilled to once again voice Vermont's call to action, Vermont Renews! Vermont Renews is a coalition of leading grassroots organizations, labor unions, racial justice groups, frontline communities, and environmental advocates. We've come together to address our state's overlapping crises: mass unemployment, racial injustice, the coronavirus pandemic, educational inequity, and climate change.

In Vermont, we are led in our response to these intersecting crises by a BIPOC-centered advisory group of experts, who are guiding this process and the policy proposals that will help us reach our climate goals.

Currently, we are working diligently on innovative policy proposals in the areas of Environmental Justice, Housing Justice, Education Equity, Food Justice, Green Justice Zones, and Criminal Justice.

Our current bill and issue priorities include, but are not limited to, the following.

RAD sees that bold and progressive action is needed immediately to combat the climate crisis. This work must be centered in equity and so must begin with passing a strong, well funded, and supported **Environmental Justice Bill, S148**. This bill, sponsored by Senator Ram Hinsdale, is a crucial bedrock to a just transition for Vermont.

The environmental justice bill is just a start, though. We also need meaningful action in other areas.

For **Housing Justice**, this means passing weatherization at scale that prioritizes our low-income community members and sets labor standards for the industry, to ensure that weatherization jobs created are good paying jobs.

It also means addressing the needs of all Vermonters, including low-income homeowners, renters and the houseless. This can be done by passing a housing omnibus bill that includes emergency housing, temporary and permanent housing for the houseless, tenants' rights, and tenant protections such as those provided for in H708, the Burlington City Just Cause Eviction Charter Change which passed out of the House Government Operations Committee yesterday and will be up for a full house vote tomorrow.

To achieve a **just food system** in Vermont, we must create equitable access to land, farming, and food. Specifically, we'd like to highlight H273, the BIPOC Land Access bill that has been sponsored by Rep. Cina, and H32, a bill that would provide universal school breakfast and lunch for all Vermont public school children. The Universal School Meals legislation needs to be passed as soon as possible so all Vermont school districts can plan next school year's budgets.

We also know that some of the best experts on what is best for our communities are the community members themselves, so we are highly prioritizing H440, a bill to create **Green Justice Zones**. This initiative will use data mapping, community design and a participatory budgeting process to support community revitalization in communities who have experienced the most harms by the current climate crisis.

When it comes to our public education system, we have a long way to go to make all **Vermont schools equitable and welcoming for all students**. We need to ensure full implementation of the Act One process to advance curriculum equity, remove police from schools, and develop an education funding system that is as equitable as possible. As the Vermont Tax Structure Commission has reported, this means shifting away from a funding system based on primary property taxes to one based on income taxes, as bill H388 would accomplish.

We all know there is an enduring issue of police violence across the nation, disproportionately impacting communities of color. A just and transparent criminal justice system is a crucial part of building an inclusive and equitable Vermont. We must pass S254 to end qualified immunity, which would create accountability for police officers and give more tools for victims of police brutality or misconduct to get the justice they deserve. In addition we need action on S228 that would ban no-knock warrants like those that led to the deaths of Breonna Taylor and even last week of Amir Locke. We also need passage of S250 that would make great strides in data collection, independent investigations and greater rights for Vermonters accused of a crime.

And of course, we are ever present for the many other conversations relating to social justice issues related to building a Vermont in which all of our community members can

thrive/flourish, including ending the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers, passing a comprehensive Opioid Crisis Omnibus bill, and advancing workers' rights in Vermont through legislation including the Card Check bill and the prevailing wage bill.

It is important that we lift the voices of the people, and today I am joined by some of our amazing leaders. Today, over two dozen individuals are speaking their truths in committees throughout the Legislature.

I ask that you hear their stories, honor their courage in testifying and support the time they are sharing with you today.

Joining me are Rights and Democracy supporters and allies, today we have a giant in the activist world, our friend and ally **Anne Zimmerman**,

Thank you again,