

Thank you Chair Sheldon and the members of the House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Committee for having me today. My name is Dan Fingas and I'm the Movement Politics Director at Rights and Democracy.

I would first like to say overall we are very supportive of passage of environmental justice legislation and especially this bill that, if passed in a fully supported way, sets an important foundation for environmental justice in the State of Vermont.

We appreciate that S148 as passed by the State Senate works to strengthen statewide community engagement efforts, encourage proactive investments in chronically underserved communities, improves collaboration across State agencies, and creates a mapping tool depicting environmental justice issues that can aid in state and local decision-making, public education, and engagement efforts.

The heart of this legislation is the EJ Advisory Committee and the call for "meaningful participation" from all individuals in the state. The EJ Advisory Committee, a group made up of community members representing immigrants, indigenous peoples, mobile park residents, social justice and environmental justice activists and more, is going to be doing the work vital to the success of this legislation.

This work is to provide independent advice and recommendations to State Agencies and the General Assembly including advising on agency community engagement plans, review agency's annual EJ complaint summaries, advise on which tools to use to measure the effectiveness of state investments, define cumulative environmental burdens, inform how agencies implement the consideration of cumulative environmental burdens and the use of the EJ mapping tool.

This is just a sampling of tasks from the legislation.

To have a just and effective Advisory Council we have to give the Advisory Council support and compensation.

We must shift away from the current practice of state agencies and departments creating their own proposed solutions and then asking for public input. This system only allows our communities to be reactionary, not proactive. While it is good that the state employs scientific and planning experts in its agencies, it hasn't created real systems to get another key component needed which are those who live in Vermont communities most affected by the Climate Crisis. These community experts are just as valuable if not more valuable than the science and planning experts and should be compensated as such.

The current system creates a power and resource imbalance with community members expected to donate their time and effort while the state has full time paid staff. This situation creates a further financial and mental strain on community members that doesn't allow for "meaningful participation" for most of our community members.

Any budget put forth in a bill that purports to be about justice, can't be set up in an unjust way that entrenches inequity.

The EJ Advisory Council will not successfully do the crucial work proposed in S148 if its members are not justly compensated for their time, thought, and effort. To do this the EJ Advisory Committee needs at least \$225,000 to properly train, support, and compensate members and ensure that we dont once again leave the voice we most need to hear out of this process.

TOTAL	Staffing (facilitator/contractor)	Program Outreach	Tech/IT needs	Professional Development & Training	Per Diems (Advisory Council)	Purchased Property Services (building costs, rental space, etc.)	Funds for Community Engagement
\$224,900	\$30,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$40,000	\$26,400	\$8,500	\$100,000
	200 hours @ \$150/hr				\$200 per diem		
	*Facilitate 9-12 Council meetings *Facilitate development of Council structure *Facilitate learning, professional development for Council members *Engage in one-on one coaching/thinking partnership	Printing, mailing, advertising, social media coordination Interactive Website		*Additional professional consultation to prepare Council members to engage with agency proposals; *Guest trainers and speakers at Council meetings; *DEI orientation; *Leadership workshop or course fees, orientation to the legislative process ~12 eligible members ~6 council meetings ~5 additional community meetings		Building rental fees for community meetings	