

**Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy**  
**Wednesday, February 23, 2022**

**S. 284 - An act relating to weatherization**

Testimony submission from David Justice, Associate Director & Reach Up Director, Vermont Adult Learning [djustice@vtadultlearning.org](mailto:djustice@vtadultlearning.org), (802) 923-3960

Good morning, Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, Senator Westman, Senator MacDonald, Senator Campion, and Senator McCormack. I am David Justice and I live in South Burlington. I am Associate Director and Reach Up Director of Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) which serves seven of Vermont's fourteen counties—Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Addison, Rutland, Windsor and Windham. I also serve on Vermont's Energy Action Network Climate Workforce Coalition to advance our state energy and climate targets. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S.284, a bill VAL endorses. I've been invited here today to: 1) share how VAL's Energy Works program is currently contributing to the goals outlined in this bill and 2) request your consideration to support statewide outreach and recruitment for weatherization programs like Energy Works.

A little bit about Vermont Adult Learning –VAL delivers reading, writing, math, English Language Learning, digital literacy, and financial literacy instruction along with academic/career advising, high school completion and workforce development. We support students (ages 16+) to work towards a future they never thought possible—and our services are free.

Vermont's ambitious weatherization goals require a coordinated team effort. Our Energy Works program fits into this configuration by tapping into the expertise and enthusiasm of community partners with a training and job placement model that works. We coordinate program design, recruitment, delivery and post-completion job placements with the Office of Economic Opportunity Weatherization Assistance Program. Notably, David Keefe, the weatherization trainer, is a past recipient of the Linda Wigington Leadership Award which celebrates visionary leaders doing extraordinary work in the field. Keefe has over three decades in the field as a practitioner and provides classroom and hands-on training for our weatherization modules which prepare students for a Building Performance Institute nationally recognized certification in Building Science Principles.

VAL's Energy Works program is aligned with, and stands ready to bolster S.284's goals to:

1. Weatherize 120,000 housing units to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
2. Save Vermont families and businesses substantial fuel costs
3. Increase volume and scope of weatherization services for Vermonters experiencing low incomes

VAL has secured a number of grants to design and deliver Energy Works, an Integrated Education and Training (IET) program preparing 90 - 120 low-income individuals, over two years, for well-paying careers in weatherization, solar panel installation and heat pump installation while also expanding access to these sustainable energy sources to low-income households.

In addition, we have proposals under consideration with Vermont Energy Investment Corporation and Bernie Sanders Congressionally Directed Spending to expand this program statewide.

VAL launched Energy Works in Rutland in September 2021:

- Thus far, 17 individuals have completed the program at an average cost of \$2,687 per student.
- The program is 52 hours over 3 weeks (34 classroom hours / 18 hours on-site)
- Of these 17 individuals, 14 are employed in weatherization with an average starting wage of \$18/hour plus benefits.
- This represents 100% course completion and 82.5% job placement rates.
- Employers state that participants who complete the Energy Works program better understand the “why” of their job, increase employee pride and efficiency, and will likely lead to stronger job retention in the field.

Our program model works. For example, Trevor, a 39-year-old Rutland father of a school-aged child, completed Energy Works in October 2021 and started working as a Weatherization Crew member at BROCC Community Action, earning \$18 per hour. Trevor’s previous job, in hospitality, cleaning guest rooms and working the front desk at a hotel, paid \$13 per hour. Three weeks of training earned him a 32.25% hourly wage increase plus full benefits including health and retirement. Trevor said: “I’m earning drastically more and there’s room to advance!”

**Where we most need support from the state is for targeted outreach and recruitment to accelerate the number of participants in our program who will enter the weatherization workforce.**

- A professional, broad-based, state-supported recruitment campaign, across media channels is critical to recruiting the number of folks needed to achieve service delivery goals and generate a steady pipeline of crew workers in this field.
- We need to fill dozens upon dozens of open weatherization crew positions *now*.
- Plus, we want to see today’s youth not only saying “When I grow up, I want to be a doctor or I want to be a teacher.”, but “I want to work in weatherization and help save the world from growing impacts of climate change.”
- We need a full concerted and multi-layered outreach and direct recruitment plan to ensure we have enough employees interested in weatherization to carry out the state’s goals over time.

VAL’s expertise lies in working with unemployed and underemployed individuals who need wraparound services to overcome a myriad of barriers to successful employment. VAL enhances Energy Works’ value proposition by integrating instruction and job readiness skills to ensure that participants leave with both the technical *and* soft skills required for on the job success. VAL is prepared to assist Energy Works trainees who lack a high school credential to earn one alongside their job training. VAL’s cadre of English Language Learning (ELL) teachers are prepared to work with New Americans- a strong referral source for workforce development—via classroom instruction, 1:1 tutoring, and innovative worksite-based programs such as English at

Work. Vermont is currently experiencing an influx of refugees. Rutland, for example, is resettling approximately fifteen individuals escaping political turmoil in Afghanistan.

An educated workforce is an employed workforce. VAL students and trainees often remain in Vermont, forming the backbone of our local economies and communities.

VAL is positioned to grow Vermont's weatherization workforce and expand energy efficient housing stock (via weatherization, heat pump, and solar cell installation training) while expanding access to and lowering energy costs for Vermonters at home and at work. We enthusiastically support S.284.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I invite your comments and questions.