

Testimony for House Commerce & Economic Development

Kate Gluckman

Serve Learn Earn

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FIRST SLIDE:

My name is Kate Gluckman and I am the director of Serve Learn Earn. I've been in this role for about a year so this is my first opportunity to testify for your committee and I want to thank you for having us today.

Serve Learn Earn is a workforce development coalition of Vermont nonprofit organizations founded in 2021 by Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, ReSOURCE, Vermont Works for Women, and Audubon Vermont. Together we are creating and enhancing paid training and service opportunities in order to create pathways into affordable education and high-wage jobs. We work across the state, from Newport to Bennington and we work with Vermonters 14 years and old. Our public funds are allocated through Forest, Parks & Recreation and many of our programs are a collaboration with SerVermont, VT's AmeriCorps service commission. These partnerships provide tremendous value as we pursue our work across the state.

My goal today is to demonstrate the impact state funding has had on our ability to strengthen Vermont's workforce and to make the case for continued support for our programs that are providing young adults and adults who are under or unemployed the opportunities to earn wages, earn industry recognized credentials, college credits, and ultimately high-wage jobs in growth sectors. We are asking for base budget funding at \$2.37 million and for you to support this request in your budget letter.

SECOND SLIDE:

I want to start with expressing deep gratitude to this committee for your past support of Serve Learn Earn. As you can see by these graphs, we have seen tremendous growth over the last three years due to public investment. As you may remember Serve Learn Earn was allocated 1.85 million in FY 2022, 1.8 million in FY2023, and \$2.3m in FY2024. This public investment has allowed us to leverage over 5 million dollars annually of additional private and federal funding, including AmeriCorps funding, to expand our programs. With these resources we have initiated a 12% increase in the number of participants, a 44% increase in the number of weeks of training and service completed, a 200% increase in the number of credentials and certifications earned, and a 52% increase in the amount of wages and stipends provided participants through these programs. To note, the gray line is the year we are currently in and represent our targets. In our mid-year report to FPR, we are on track to meet or exceed these goals by the end of June.

THIRD SLIDE:

You will hear from my colleagues about the specific workforce development programs their organizations run, but I want to make sure that you understand our continuum of programming and how at every stage of career development, Serve Learn Earn is having an impact. Because we work with such a wide spectrum of ages, our programs are grouped within three categories: Career Exploration, Early Professional Experience, and Workforce Development.

Career Exploration provides high school age students the opportunities to gain hands-on experience, learn professional and technical skills, and engage with experts and employers in the conservation, education, and building trades sectors. For many this is the beginning of their career journey and we are building foundational leadership and interpersonal skills.

Early Professional Experience programs provide young adults the opportunity to learn through work. These programs provide sustained engagement to develop technical and durable skills, earn credentials of value and real work experience, as well as earn stipends or wages. Many of these positions are AmeriCorps, which allows folks to earn the Segal Education Award at the completion of service. These awards can be used for tuition and other education-related expenses. Additionally, many of these programs work in collaboration with local institutes of higher education and provide academic credit for participants. These programs are drawing young adults to the state and connecting them to employment opportunities that will enable them to stay!

Our workforce development programs provide intensive training in sector specific skills for young adults and adults. These programs provide opportunities to build personal and professional credentials, earn college credit and certificates of value, engage with employers in the field, and provide direct pathways into employment. Many of our participants in these programs face significant hurdles to employment, including poverty, lack of transportation, and mental health challenges and benefit from wrap around supports that enable them to be job-ready.

Across our programs, participants complete projects in high-priority areas including affordable housing, climate resiliency, flood recovery, education, and food security. Our impact is not only through growing Vermont's workforce, but also through the projects completed by participants that improve our states environment, strengthens our communities, and care for our most vulnerable neighbors.

Coming out of our programs about 35% of our participants continue in their secondary and post-secondary education, 15% continue with training and service opportunities – such as continuing to work with conservation corps or joining AmeriCorps programs, and about 35% head directly into the workforce. Of those folks seeking employment, we placed 88 into high wage jobs last year in the conservation and building trade sectors and have seen a 42% growth between our first and second year in our ability to place participants into quality employment. Long term, multi-year employment data is immensely valuable to all our programs, and very difficult for us to gather. Because of these challenges we are in the beginning conversations

with the Department of Labor to access their data sets and longitudinal data to analyze the long-term impact of our programs.

Fourth Slide:

While SLE has four member organizations, we are working in collaboration with over 300 employers and community partners across the state. These are just a few of the companies that have benefitted from SLE's training programs and have hired alumni into open positions. There are 3 open jobs for every 1 Vermonter right now in the state and SLE plays an important role in connecting trained and eager workers with these high-quality employers. We continue to build new relationships each year and public funding has helped us connect with new employer and community partners.

Fifth Slide:

I'm going to wrap up my section of testimony with sharing our collective impact since 2021. The yellow map represents the location of service projects completed in the last year and the blue map represents the home towns of SLE participants. As you can see, we are working across the state and each year we work to expand our geographic reach. For example, we are very excited about a pilot program with the Northwoods Stewardship Center to support young adults working on state lands this upcoming summer. As you can see, Serve Learn Earn is making a difference for Vermont employers, Vermont communities, and for Vermonters who are seeking to better themselves through training, advance their careers, and to provide for their families. Through our programs we are creating real pathways into affordable education and high-wage work. Continued state funding will allow us to provide new trainings in high-growth sectors such as green building and heavy machinery, engage more employers through internship and hiring opportunities, and deliver programming in expanded regions. While we understand that the budget will be very tight this year, our results speak to the effectiveness of SLE to address the state's workforce challenges, as well as our ability to complete projects in critical areas such as climate resiliency and affordable housing.

Thank you for your time and for considering our budget request and I'll invite Tom Longstreth to come up to talk about ReSOURCE.