

LAND ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY BOARD



Collective and Individual Community Testimony as of April 16, 2023



Below you will find the collective testimony of over 60 Vermonters from throughout the state along with some of their personal testimonies. This collection was organized by Seeding Power Vermont and the Vermont Releaf Collective. We hope you'll consider these folks and the many others who couldn't and didn't feel able to speak up as the Vermont state budget continues to make its way through the State House. All identities are shared with explicit permission.

To whom it may concern,

"We, the undersigned, fully support an appropriation of \$1,200,000 in fiscal year 2024 with a commitment to subsequent appropriations for the next four years for the Land Access and Opportunity Board to ensure baseline operations.

The Sunrise Report from the Land Access and Opportunity Board states that in order for this Board to do their work, they require an annual baseline budget of \$1.2 million dollars. But we know in order to be successful the LAOB must remain supported. That is why it is critical to ensure that this Board can continue its important work for the next four years and achieve future success by committing now to making an appropriation of \$1.2 million each year for the next four years.

The LAOB was created by a group of community organizers dedicated to reparative frameworks for addressing continued marginalization and systemic oppression. As a state, we need to resource the work of the LAOB in a sustainable way that allows for future success and independence, and start to fulfill the equity goals laid out by the state of Vermont. There are folks ready to do the work, and they need continued and sustained support.

The original legislation presented a heavy lift of bringing this Board together, which was accomplished in the Sunrise Report, and now we need to shift power in decision-making to community members who are most affected, trust them to do this work, and move money into the community.

Supporting the LAOB is an opportunity to lift up and fulfill a commitment to equity in Vermont, and takes Vermont a step closer to equitable land access programming that puts land into the hands of those who have traditionally been subjected to marginalization. This work will build resiliency and safety in communities, ensuring that folks who will be most subjected to climate disaster are able to equitably access land and services. We respectfully ask the Legislature to support the LAOB by appropriating \$1,200,000 in fiscal year 2024 with a commitment to make this appropriation each year for the next four years."

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Collectively Signed,

Kenya Lazuli (she/they), Corinth. Multi-racial Black Femme, Member of the LAOB; **Susan** Smiley, New Haven, Member of the LAOB; **Samantha** Langevin (she/her), Bristol, multi racial woman; **Madison** Barney (she/her), Middlesex, Two Spirit, Shoshone woman living in Vermont; **Alicia** Barrow (she/her), White River Junction, Afro-Indigenous; **Marita** Canedo (she/her), Essex Junction, immigrant community, woman, single mother; **Ernest** Caswell Buster, Milton, Farmworker; **Djeli** Forchion (she/he /they /ki), Marlboro, Brown skinned descendant of enslaved Africans; **Lena** Greenberg (they/them), Burlington, Trans/gender non-conforming; **Earl** Hatley (he/him), Quechee, Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi; **Rhianna** Kendrick (she/her), Brattleboro; **Ashley** Laporte (she/her), Duxbury, Black Woman: Haitian, French Canadian, American; **Matthew** LeFluer (he/him), Alburgh, individual of color with disability; **Beverly** LittleThunder (she/her), Huntington, community member, Indigenous woman, earth steward, **Anonymous**, Lyndonville, multicultural of color family of 6, **Opeyemi** Parham, Montpelier, Black female bisexual polyamorous Elder (66) pagan, annual income of \$27K; **Enrique** Peredo (he/him), Hinesburg, pacific islander; **Clarence** Tanager (they/them), Walden, low-income, white, trans-nonbinary person; **Kristianne** Gale, Chelsea; **Grace** Gershuny, Barnet; **Clarence** Tanager, Walden; **Natalie** Muskin (she/her), Burlington; **Caroline** Gordon (she/her), Tunbridge; **Henry** Harris (he/him), Marshfield, White; **Shelby** Kalm (she/her), South Royalton, queer; **Christiane** Laporte (she/her), Waterbury, **Katie** Michels (she, her, hers), Montpelier, **Vera** Simon-Nobes (she/her), Charlotte; **Graham** Unangst-Rufenacht (he/him), Montpelier; **Bonnie** Acker, Burlington; **Joanne** Beck, Bondville; **Lindsey** Berk, Brandon; **Katherine** Broughton, East Thetford; **Megan** Browning, Monkton; **Gabriela** Bucini, Shelburne; **Matthew** Burke, Charlotte; **Martha** Caswell, Burlington; **Jennifer** Daniels, Colchester; **Lizzie** Deloge, Newfane; **Rasna** Dhillon, Montpelier; **Kelly** Dolan, Waitsfield; **Caitlin** Duffy, Morristown; **Emma** Hileman, Ludlow; **Emily** Landenberger, Weybridge; **Seanna** McGraw, Burlington; **Barbara** Murphy-Warrington, Lincoln; **Grace** Pazdan, Montpelier; **Emma** Refer, East Haven; **Rob** Reiber, Lincoln; **David** Ritchie, Putney; **Gillian** Shapiro, Bethel; **Neil** Silins, Brandon; **Shaun** Stephens, Montpelier; **April** Thanhauser, Charlotte; **Michael** Verla, Montpelier; **Mollie** Wills, Montpelier; **Margaret** Woodruff, Charlotte;

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This is the very least that can be done to begin to repair harm caused to Black and Indigenous communities in this state. Land has been violently stolen from the original inhabitants and wealth has been generated at the cost of Black lives solely for the benefit of white people. The original request for \$10 million in H273 should be reserved for this work this amount is a drop in the bucket and the legislature should be doing everything they can to secure as many places as possible for BIPOC to thrive."

-**Kenya Lazuli** (she/they), Corinth. Multi-racial Black Femme, Member of the LAOB

"My access to land was against the odds in so many ways. I am an Indigenous, queer person who bought her house and two acres solo. It depended on me being able to live with friends for the 4 months before I bought it to save money. I have one full time job, and 5 part time jobs (about 85 hours of work per week) and that made buying this home possible. If I had children, an ailing parent, or other factors, it would have been impossible for me to work enough to make it possible. Additionally, much of this journey was Ancestor-lead. I got "lucky" as I was buying in a time when 99% of people had to waive inspections and appraisal differences. I did not. I had a realtor and team who protected me. I also have significant educational privilege. So, my degree and thus employment were seen as "legitimate" and "trustworthy." My educational privilege makes it so that my student debt is not as high as many others'. Additionally, if federal loans had not been in forbearance due to the COVID-19 emergency, I likely would not have been able to buy this home. It was timing. It was luck. It kept almost falling through."

-**Madison Barney** (she/her), Middlesex, Two Spirit, Shoshone woman living in Vermont

Dear legislative representative,

Please consider that historical obstacles to homeowner and the intentional methods of broadening the wealth gap continue to have long last long effects on current generations. It's time to proactively narrow that gap and heal wounds caused by Historical political policies that have held marginalized people back from prosperity and the pursuit of happiness.

-**Alicia Barrow** (she/her), White River Junction, Afro-Indigenous

Farmworkers are left out of the discussion on housing. Many other states have already addressed farmworkers housing and have already built homes for farmworkers. Farm's need technical support to meet the needs of the agricultural workforce. The LAOB allows public comment and no other public comment like this can be found in Vt.

- **Ernest Caswell Buster**, Milton, Farmworker

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"Vermont's identity as a working landscape, alongside its intent to protect people and the planet from undue harm, suggest that support of the LAOB is essential for this state. For centuries, access to land has been restricted to the few who hold all the identities for whom our society has been built. This has and continues to exclude the countless people who have skills and energy to offer this working landscape, and who deserve to benefit from connection to the land. In this moment of multilayered crises, supporting equitable land access has never been more urgent."

-**Lena Greenberg** (they/them), Burlington, Trans/gender non-conforming

All BIPOC Peoples in Vermont need the opportunity to own land in this state. This is very difficult now for various reasons, and state assistance is necessary in many cases. For the Abenaki, our lands were taken without a treaty, without our permission and we are left to struggle on our own under severe racial discrimination. Not only for the bands, but individual tribal members struggle for land ownership and the opportunity to raise our own traditional foods to support our health and maintain traditions while preserving seed stocks. The land trust is vital to insure that the past is made up for and that land can be made available for those who would tend the land in healthy ways, honoring our Mother Earth, and adding diversity to our state's farming communities.

- **Earl Hatley** (he/him), Quechee, Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi

The many inequities in our society are linked to historic efforts to bar access to land and home ownership for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. As our state faces a housing crisis and other mental and physical health crises, it's critical that we create systemic solutions that are targeted at BIPOC so that we stop the cycle of inequity. It has been my life's goal to own land and a home because I know that those things are key to my self determination. I believe all BIPOC should have an opportunity to do the same

-**Ashley Laporte** (she/her), Duxbury, Black Woman: Haitian, French Canadian, American

The purchase of the land we live on was obtained by my white partner. As a Indigenous woman who mother five children alone on no child support, I could never qualify to buy a farm. I grow my own veggies and depended on those to feed my family. Credit worthiness is judged differently when your skin does not match the person approving your loan. This board gives me hope that there will be more land owned by people who are so often marginalized. Please support them financially so we can proudly say the our state recognizes the past history and is now trying to help everyone gain access to what they are so often denied

-**Beverly LittleThunder** (she/her), Huntington, community member, Indigenous woman, earth steward

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Over the past decade, I worked predominantly to support folks at risk of, or struggling with homelessness, with significant experience in supporting those with chronic homelessness and accompanying disabilities. Access to land and housing wasn't even a consideration for most of the people whose stories I had the privilege of hearing, and people were shocked to be asked what type of housing they would dream of, when invited to have dreams.

For myself, as a teenage parent by the age of 18, and a divorced single mother at the age of 21, housing was critical in my ability to parent my child, and also access opportunities for home ownership in my future. I experienced housing instability while struggling to manage as an early educator, which prompted me to leave the field. At the age of 30, while working in the field supporting others through an area non-profit, I was able to access the opportunity to purchase a home through the USDA Rural Development program. I also had the privilege of being a second generation homeowner through this program, working with the same individual who supported my parent's in accessing home ownership 30 years prior.

I am a white woman, privileged simply by my existence. I hold power based upon the work I've done in the community, and the relationships I've been able to create. And still, access to housing wasn't simple or easy. I support LAOB, and their work, as it's crucial in ensuring that marginalized communities have equal access to housing, and that reparations can be made to those who haven't been afforded that right.

-Rhianna Kendrick (she/her), Brattleboro

Much of this land we live on was brutally taken from its original stewards. It is time that we honor equity in land access and stewardship.

-Enrique Peredo (he/him), Hinesburg, pacific islander

After being temporary farm workers, tenants subject to rising rents, those properties being sold out from under us and experiencing homelessness, my family found a path to homeownership through the USDA Rural Development Home Loan program. Typically homes bought through the USDA program need to be an acre or less to qualify. This does not meet the needs of low-income families who would benefit from the greater self-sufficiency that land stewardship can provide.

My family supports the work of LAOB to bridge the equity gap especially when socioeconomic oppression is the factor restricting land and homeownership, as generational poverty can be transcended through this ownership.

-Kristianne Gale, Chelsea

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I believe that it is critically important to decommodify the means of survival, including healthy food, clean water, and clean air, and shelter -- including the natural resources that are necessary for human well-being. Equitable access to land that is the primary source of our necessities of life is key. The focus of my work at present is establishment of the Cooperation Vermont Community Land Trust, with an emphasis on removing homestead scale properties from the market system and offering low cost access to land and housing, at the same time providing aging current owners with the assistance needed to care for the land in a regenerative manner and the opportunity to age in place.

The Land Access Opportunity Board is important to implementing this plan, and I look forward to working with the LAOB to help replicate this model in other parts of Vermont.

With thanks for your good work --

- Grace Gershuny, Barnet

The Vermont Farmer is aging out of farming, and young white Vermonters aren't interested in investing in our farming community economy. Young Vermonters leave Vermont in droves, that's all they do. If there are people of mixed ages who will come and steward land, take jobs, and contribute to our communities, that's an asset. If these folks are people of color willing to help diversify an almost monolithically white population, that's an asset too. Diversity is strength. Diversity of ideas, of genetics, of cultures and identities. We need black and brown people in rural Vermont to show other black and brown people that it's possible and safe.

We need a new generation of people to rebuild an agricultural and working class economy here to help stabilize a very troubling economic future. We also need to side with justice and do what's right. What's being asked for here is very little compared to what's needed. Please help make this happen, for the future and for justice. Thank you

-Henry Harris (he/him), Marshfield, White

Access to land provides a critical foundation for so many public goods - ranging from affordable housing, to local food or wood and the opportunity to steward farm and forestland, to the solace that time in open space provides. All Vermonters deserve access to land and the public goods it provides, and the Land Access and Opportunity Board will ensure that that wish becomes true by identifying pathways for equitable access to land and resources for communities who have not historically had that access. Change cannot happen in a single year, and the LAOB needs resources not just next year, but into the future, so they have the capacity to continue their essential work.

-Katie Michels (she, her, hers), Montpelier

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As a white person who has benefitted from many privileges, I recognize that it's past time for the Land Access & Opportunity Board. The work outlined by the board is critical towards building a more equitable Vermont. Equitable systems benefit everyone: those who have experienced discrimination and others like me who want to live in a place where Vermonters have access to the resilience that land can offer across any social identity. The 1.2 million requested is a small step towards creating a more just Vermont. Please support this critical work!

-Vera Simon-Nobes (she/her), Charlotte

This approach for supporting increased land/home ownership for marginalized people demonstrates both the practical steps and the funding to further this initiative. Let's celebrate what will be added, significantly, to communities throughout Vermont!

-Bonnie Acker, Burlington

I work with clients who live in marginalized communities. Knowing that lives improve when there is the safety of shelter, is a foundational piece. Placing poor, marginalized populations in cluster housing often leads to a culture of poverty. Placing housing close to shopping, making that available to the population along side housing that is integrated throughout the community will help to stabilize and provide a platform for marginalized populations to move into a more secure and fulfilling existence. Without secure housing, nothing can improve. Think of Maslow's pyramid. Foundation is shelter, food, safety. When those are not in place, the person is unlikely to move up the pyramid to self actualization. To know who you are and what you do best. So here we sit, with a large population of systemic poverty and homelessness. Until the housing crisis is managed, and there is safety and shelter for everyone, we will continue to struggle with this issue. It will continue to bring down the economy and progress of Vermont. We must start building and creating accessible communities for those who live in this state. Not Air BnB's or new hotels, or any of that for tourists. We need to create a state where all of us can live, not just provide housing for the tourist whims of the New York tri-state area. With global warming, we cannot sit by and rely on our ski industry to carry to economic security. It's just not going to happen! If we begin developing a secure economy based on the needs of all who live in this state, we will begin to see change.

-Joanne Beck, Bondville

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As Executive Director of ACORN, a community-based non-profit focused on relocalizing and strengthening our local food economy, I have witnessed personally and professionally how access to land and housing has become a paramount challenge for young, aspiring farmers. This challenge is compounded by systemic forces that preclude marginalized populations from accessing traditional channels of credit and financing, made worse by the pandemic land grabbing. Second home owners and folks fleeing urban regions have been snapping up the most affordable land and homes in Addison County, turning previous farmland into private tracts of single family homes and mini suburbias. Land and home prices are exorbitantly high, and many farmers are only able to purchase land if they have generational wealth or come from a previous high-paying corporate job. I applaud the state of Vermont for creating the Land Access and Opportunity Board. Providing more opportunities for marginalized folks to access home and land ownership is a key step towards racial equity, environmental justice and a just transition.

-Lindsey Berk, Brandon

Given the history of this country, steeped in land theft and genocide, it is imperative that those marginalized communities whose ancestors were victims of this theft and violence regain their power and have the opportunity to steward the land. I cannot more strongly support the need to "shift power in decision-making to community members who are most affected, trust them to do this work, and move money into the community."

-Megan Browning, Monkton

I'd like to share the story of two dear friends of mine. They're in their 30s and have lived in Vermont for many years. Sharing a true love for farming and land caring, they started a farm. As agroecologists, they believed in tending the land in such a way to bear healthy crops and be a resource for generations to come. However, as young farmers with limited financial resources, they found it very difficult to afford the taxes and the expenses needed to start a farm. After a few years they had to close their farm. It's particularly hard to access land and resources for new and young farmers, yet they are the generation with the strength and passion to continue a legacy of farming and caring for the land in Vermont.

-Gabriela Bucini, Shelburne

Dear Legislators:

We, as a nation, must acknowledge, honor and repair the harms created by policies that deliberately established barriers to wealth generation. Let us give our entire Vermont community access to land and housing thus aligning with the true spirit and lifeblood of this Brave State.

-Jennifer Daniels, Colchester

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Secure access to land and land tenure is perhaps the most fundamental element to address historical injustice and contemporary inequity, and provides the necessary foundation for belonging and long-term care of place. I have personally benefited from programs available through a local housing trust, and I and neighbors can now together care for our shared forests, farms, and waters. Many more should share in that opportunity, especially those with deep cultural knowledge of place, and those who have intentionally and systematically been displaced and dispossessed.

-Matthew Burke, Charlotte

Systemic discrimination cannot be combated nor true equity achieved by things like diversity programs alone, without addressing economic opportunity and land access. LAOB's work is critical concrete action improving the material conditions of historically and/or currently marginalized communities.

-Lizzie Deloge, Newfane

LAOB is doing phenomenal work that needs support!

-Caitlin Duffy, Morristown

For my senior honors thesis at UVM I wrote and created a film about food sovereignty in Vermont. Food sovereignty is "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems", a goal that I have found is deeply instilled in the culture and beliefs of many in this state. The movement to achieve food sovereignty is not possible without one of its pillars being equitable access to land and the ability for all to grow food as they wish. The creation of this board is a huge step in the right direction, and its continuance is crucial to improving the justice of our food system and otherwise

-Seanna McGraw, Burlington

Land access is one of the largest barriers to overcome in order for people to achieve stable housing, accruing equity/wealth, and food sovereignty. I believe all these things are a human right. I'd personally love to see more black, brown, indigenous, queer, and disabled landowners in Vermont, because we would all be better off with more diversity and creativity in agricultural spaces.

-Emma Refer, East Haven

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Before Vermont self-declared its occupation of the land in 1777, it is estimated that at least 10,000 Indigenous people were living in the region, including an estimated 4,000 Abenaki living in the Champlain Valley where I currently reside. The centuries of genocide, eugenics, displacement, and land dispossession that occurred since that time has placed Abenaki peoples and other Indigenous peoples living in Vermont at a significant disadvantage. After the Civil War, freed slaves and their descendants obtained 12-19 million acres of land, though in the time since, discriminatory federal land policies, lending policies, and similar programs categorically denied Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmland ownership and housing opportunities that were available to their white counterparts. As a result of these discriminatory policies and programs, BIPOC farmers were not able to own property and were instead forced to rent land from white landlords. BIPOC farmers who did manage to secure loans experienced predatory lending practices with unfair terms. By 1934, the practice of redlining became widespread by the US Dept of Housing and Urban Development's Home Owners' Loan (HOLC) program, which denied black and brown residents equal access to home mortgages and offered subprime loans with unfair terms. These local, state, and federal policies were intentionally developed to economically, socially, and racially discriminate against BIPOC community members. The resulting multi-generational poverty and lack of access to capital has created a disturbing disproportionate wealth gap for land and home ownership in what we now call Vermont (and the rest of the country, for that matter). The work of the LAOB seeks to rectify these harms and I'm grateful for their work. In order to effectively carry out this critical work, I strongly urge the legislature to financially support their efforts by appropriating the \$1,200,000 in fiscal year 2024 with a commitment to make this appropriation each year for the next four years.

-Emily Landenberger, Weybridge

A broad collection of citizens initiating an approach to addressing systemic failures in land access.

-Rob Reiber, Lincoln

As the gap between the wealthy and everyone else grows, this can be just one small way to change this direction. The land and soil itself is in jeopardy, and its restoration depends on supporting ways we can all collaborate to grow healthy soils This is one way to do this.

-David Ritchie, Putney

This is critical work in light of the housing crisis Vermonters are experiencing. We need to take this step to allow systemically oppressed and marginalized communities accumulate wealth through home ownership after decades of discrimination and inequitable policies that continue to harm them, like redlining.

-Gillian Shapiro, Bethel

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This is a first step in rectifying a longstanding and ongoing wrong: the economic theft and discrimination that Black people and other people of color have experienced in Vermont (and the rest of the US).

-**Shaun Stephens**, Montpelier

Because access to land, especially for farming and for land stewardship should be available to all who are willing to serve in this way, I support making land access possible for traditionally marginalized people.

-**April Thanhauser**, Charlotte

Vermont prides itself on being a welcoming place to all, regardless of background, ethnicity, race, class, or gender. In order to truly embody this value of being welcoming and supportive to current and new residents, certain structural barriers must be addressed and/or removed that currently prohibit populations who have been historically discriminated against from accessing land and homeownership. I believe the LAOB is a step in the right direction, and would support Vermont's efforts to keep its working agricultural landscape intact, while also supporting Vermont communities in their efforts towards sustainability, resiliency, and equity.

-**Michael Verla**, Montpelier

This is one of the single greatest investments we can make for a livable future for all those living in Vermont.

-**Mollie Wills**, Montpelier

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Rural Vermont firmly supports the appropriations request from the LAOB, and supports the legislature going further and providing the LAOB the economic security of 4 years of continued operation with a total appropriation of \$4.8 million.

Rural Vermont is a more than 35 year old member based, community stakeholder led, agricultural organization focusing on economic, social, and ecological health and equity and justice. In our work locally, and in our partnerships nationally - the lack of long term, secure access to and / or holding deed to quality land and housing is one of the primary barriers to farmers, farmworkers, and our community members more broadly having their essential needs met. Data documenting land and home access in VT and nationally clearly reflect disparities impacting communities who have been historically and systemically impacted by oppression and / or discrimination; and racism has been declared a public health emergency by the State of Vermont itself. The LAOB is constituted of stakeholder members of these impacted communities. It is important to fund this particular body because it addresses gaps in existing funding programs and boards affecting land and housing access and affordability. It's emphasis, expertise, and structure is unique and empowers affected stakeholder to meaningfully address the critical disparities which affect them and their communities.

Rural VT is available to provide spoken testimony on this as well.

Thank you,

- **Graham** Unangst-Rufenacht (he/him), Montpelier, Policy Director of Rural Vermont

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The mission of the White River Land Collaborative is to build a resilient land-based economy rooted in equitable land access, collaborative relationships, and community involvement. Land access is a key priority of our work, and we support the appropriation of \$1.2 million in 2024, in addition to \$1.2 million for the next four years to the Land Access and Opportunity Board (LAOB).

In Vermont, nearly 98% of farms are white-owned—the same number of white-owned farms in the rest of the United States. The two main roadblocks preventing interested folks from farming are lack of access to land and money. It's no surprise that these barriers are felt more intensely among Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), farmworkers, women, and the LGBTQ+ community.

Government-led land theft is one of the primary drivers of land loss among Indigenous communities in the U.S. Policies like the Allotment Act of 1887 and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1943 alone stripped Indigenous populations of 90 million acres of land. The termination era, which began under the Eisenhower presidency, broke up many tribal governments and destroyed numerous reservations. As a direct result of this era, Indigenous land decreased to 2.3% of its original size. Since the United States founding, Indigenous communities have lost 1.5 billion acres of land.

Indigenous communities aren't the only ones who have had their land taken. Over the past century, 90% of Black-owned farmland has been stripped away through damaging agricultural policies and racial violence. In 1910, Black farmers owned between 16 and 19 million acres of land according to the Census of Agriculture.

However, there is a tremendous opportunity for Vermont to be a leader in rectifying this past harm and bring land back into the hands of BIPOC farmers and landowners. Given our state's history of land theft, it's important we learn from those damaging practices and use it to fuel future efforts that aim to change the direction of land access to one that supports BIPOC communities, restores our environment, and creates more just and resilient food, farming, and land stewardship opportunities for all. We urge you to support the appropriation of \$1.2 million in fiscal year 2024 and commit to appropriating \$1.2 million each year for the next four years.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

-**Shelby Kalm** (she/her), South Royalton, queer

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Testimony I: I came to Central Vermont to retire in peace after scouting out (and rejecting) a more urban lifestyle in Burlington. That was in 2018.

I joined five other residents (4 white/ one loosely reconnecting w/Abenaki roots but wt. passing) at a creative artistic community well known in this area: All Together Now Arts collective.

During my first year, I witnessed and commented on racist incidents happening with the three non-white children in the daycare center. I was hired by the ATN daycare director as a consultant (let's translate that as a police officer for a Black child in the program). My consulting advice to the (mixed race) family was that they would need to move away from Central Vermont, as they were already at the most liberal and racially flexible child care center in the area, which certainly wasn't serving their child.

My forthrightness and clear boundaries on what I was willing and not willing to do in that community led to a November 2020 community meeting where I was personally attacked over a 2-hour "meeting".

I persisted in presenting my truth. By January of 2021, I had submitted a letter to the 2 wt. female owners, describing how horrible that meeting had been for me, and stating that I would be leaving the community by the summer.

I was asked to be out by April 1st.

I hired mediation, and the negotiated compromise was that I would be out May 1st.

I remained legally unhoused for the next 7 months, until I got off a waitlist for senior housing through the Montpelier Housing Authority.

This remains a very bad taste in my mouth. I'll say to anyone who will listen that "All Together Now as a community is artistic and Bohemian but not ANTI-RACIST."

-**Opeyemi** Parham, Montpelier, Black female bisexual polyamorous Elder (66) pagan, annual income of \$27K

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Testimony 2: I recognize-- with this story number two that I TOTALLY blanked out-- a very traumatic experience from the Fall of 2017.

I returned to Vermont from the Pacific Northwest having tried to emigrate to Canada unsuccessfully. I returned to take up a winter living space on land owned by a white queer female friend whom I had lived with in 2008 to 2009.

I arrived on the East Coast (stopping with friends in Western Massachusetts first) to be told that the offer had been rescinded. I had expected to be spending the winter in a 20-ft with a wood burning stove on this friend's land. Part of the explanation I got over time was that her new (female white) partner "felt unsafe" with someone she did not know well.

That smelled racist to me; and has since been confirmed as having been racist.

A second sad issue was the couple felt overly visible already; being a lesbian white couple in rural Trump America in 2017.

So much for allies.

Let's hear it for silos!

-Opeyemi Parham, Montpelier, Black female bisexual polyamorous Elder (66) pagan, annual income of \$27K

As an immigrant coming to the US, I came thinking I would be here for only a few years, but that wasn't the case. I lived in OH, then came to VT in 2010. It felt like it was a good place to raise my children because of the quality of the environment - good air, nature, outdoors. In my country, I was an activist, and continued to get involved here in the movement, now with Migrant Justice. All these years I have been renting as a mother of 3. I co-parent with my ex, but didn't have the ability to not live with him even while separated and divorced. It was good for co-parenting, but I didn't have any opportunity or access to anything else, even the possibility to even think about getting a place, nothing. Rent takes more than half of our salary. Not being a citizen, there is no way to understand or know if I am eligible to get a loan, etc, or to understand the systems and what options I have. As I got involved more in the movement, I met another activist who was also a single dad. He found an old farm who was willing to sell on a "handshake," that he could rent to own with a down payment. I thought "this only happens only because it is two white people, will never happen for me or my community." This other activist suggested they try to create a collective on this property. This was the only time I has ever heard something that could be a choice for me - access to land, a collective, a community, while building for the future. At first,

LAND ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY BOARD



Collective and Individual Community Testimony as of April 16, 2023



this person created a diverse board that was involved in the movement and agroecology. For the first year, I poured all my extra money and time into that land. Renovated old dairy spaces, created meeting spaces, work parties to fix the house, painted the house, I put a lot of energy into this because this was the dream. I didn't move there because I wanted to keep the kids in their school. For a year and a half, it felt like a safe space and the only way I would have access to land. I've never had a ton of money, enough to get a loan, and I don't even really understand credit scores or loans.

But friendship with this person (the person offering land access) wasn't always good. They can be oblivious about their own bias, and they take up a lot of space. I tried to figure out a way to bring my activist community into space with his. But I began to realize that he was using the work and names of others to get funding and resources. He would decide which meetings I would attend and which I wouldn't, and has controlled access to resources and information for others. He is very good at bringing people together, but everything goes to his benefit.

At the end of the day, this is not my land or farm. I tried for years to get people to join in and live there, but the dynamic with the other person was not good. My organization had a big event there last year, and he listed us as a sponsor without telling us, which created problems for me in my work. It was made clear we were not part of the event he was organizing, but that would be there at the same time. He would still insist that we were involved and it was very uncomfortable.

This was the breaking point for me and I decided I would not be involved. At a recent conference he wanted to approach me and that is when I decided that I would speak the truth about what this relationship had been (my dreams about land access for my family) and what happened. That dream is gone and I don't trust that I will have any place or leverage there.

Now, I am still renting and my landlord has increased the rent and told me that I can only stay for one more year, even though my youngest still has 2 more years in school. I'm trying to negotiate staying for 2 years and wondering if I will have to go through a big loan or something. I don't feel like I have the knowledge to have my own place. I feel like I am 10-15 yrs behind the people my age who have already "figured it out". I still understand the privileges I do have, but it feels unfair to be doing this work and still not have access to a place where I can just breathe and feel confident that I am going to stay.

- **Marita** Canedo (she/her), Essex Junction, immigrant community, woman, single mother