

February 17th, 2025

Dear Chair Durfee and the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry,

Vermont's thriving future depends on a skilled and well-prepared workforce. This vision aligns with the priorities established by this committee and has inspired your commitment over the past four years to funding the Serve Learn Earn program.

We continue to see powerful results every year. Here is data that demonstrates our effectiveness and the continued importance of investing in Serve Learn Earn. Since 2021, SLE partners have:

- **Served over 1,445 participants**, engaging them in **11,400 weeks of training and service**.
- Helped our participants earn **over 600 industry-recognized credentials** including high value construction trade certifications in carpentry, weatherization, and HVAC, as well as OSHA-10, logging, and college credit.
- Provided over **\$3.84 million dollars in wages and stipends** to participants as they complete high-priority service projects in flood recovery, affordable and accessible housing, food security, outdoor recreation, and education.
- Strengthened our economy by working with **over 370 Vermont employers** in the building trade, conservation, agriculture, and education sectors who have urgent need for skilled workers.

Unfortunately, SLE was not fully supported in the Governor's FY26 budget proposal. We have requested \$2.5 million to continue this work, but only \$500,000 was included in the proposed budget. With federal workforce development funding under attack, state-level resources are critical for us to continue offering programs for Vermonters.

With the legislature's support we can extend our reach to more communities, enhance participant enrollment, expand our curriculum to new trainings, diversify the credentials offered, and continue to facilitate seamless connections between our graduates and prospective employers. **Continued funding is essential.**

In addition to the data above, we also know that our efforts contribute to the individual success of our participants – Vermonters often overlooked by other programs – and meet critical employer needs. We hear this firsthand not only from our participants, but from our employer partners.

"ReSOURCE has been an extremely valuable partner for CVOEO's Weatherization Program. We currently employ five of their former students working for us now in both our Middlebury office and our Colchester Office. Of the five, two have been promoted to an Energy Efficiency Coach and Subcontractor Administrator role. [...] We have participated in just about every one of their Construction and Weatherization 101 classes as mentors and participants in the job fairs. It can be said that without ReSOURCE our recruiting and retention goals would not be met."

Dwight Decoster, Champlain Valley Weatherization Services Director

"It opened up opportunities in trades that I envisioned but had difficulty pursuing on my own. VWW rocks!"

Trailblazers Participant, Brattleboro 2024

"I was offered, and subsequently accepted, the position as Forest Ecologist [...] I cannot thank you enough for all that you taught me through the Forest Conservation Internship and the skills that you helped me hone. Your support and inspiration helped me to realize just how much I enjoy working in the intersection of bird conservation and forest management and without your strong reference for me, I may not have landed what can only be described as my dream job."

Jacob Crawford, Forest Conservation Intern, Audubon Vermont

We understand the budget remains tight and the uncertainty around federal funding is causing real concern. We also know that Vermont needs flexible, accessible, and effective workforce training programs that reach all corners of the state. We cannot solve the housing and environmental problems we face without skilled workers. We will not reach our climate goals without skilled workers. And Vermont businesses will not thrive without a well-trained workforce.

Serve Learn Earn continues to be a smart investment that can build state revenues and reduce reliance on public assistance. We hope that you will continue to support Serve Learn Earn and include a recommendation of a \$2.5M appropriation in your budget letter to the House Appropriations Committee. Your support is instrumental in ensuring the continued success of Serve Learn Earn and the prosperity of Vermonters.

Thank you for considering this request, and we welcome the opportunity to share more information and answer additional questions you may have. We have attached our 2023-2024 report that conveys the very real impact Serve Learn Earn is having in Vermont.

With gratitude,

Kate Gluckman, Director of Serve Learn Earn

Breck Knauft, Executive Director of Vermont Youth Conservation Corps

Rhoni Basden, Executive Director of Vermont Works for Women

Kim Guertin, Director of the Green Mountain Audubon Center

Tom Longstreth, Executive Director of ReSOURCE