

## **Testimony Requesting for Support of the State Youth Council's Funding Request**

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I'm here to express my strong support for providing state funding to the Vermont State Youth Council.

I've had the privilege of working directly with several council members, and I've been consistently impressed by their engagement, preparation, and seriousness about public service. These students show up ready to learn, ready to listen, and ready to contribute meaningfully to our democratic process.

The Youth Council was created to ensure young Vermonters have a real voice in policymaking. It has already produced recommendations, testimony, and public engagement. Today, it is requesting \$140,000 in state funding to replace federal dollars, in part because of growing concerns about censorship and restrictions tied to federal funding.

This matters.

When funding limits how young people can describe their experiences, express their identities, or discuss difficult issues, we undermine the very purpose of civic engagement. Democracy only works when people feel safe to speak honestly.

State funding allows Vermont to protect youth privacy, support free expression, and promote the full diversity of our communities. It reflects our values at a time when federal policies do not always do so.

This is a modest investment with lasting impact. It helps develop thoughtful, informed, and engaged future leaders.

I urge you to support this request and affirm Vermont's commitment to open dialogue, inclusion, and youth leadership.

Thank you.

[Submitted by Rep. Monique Priestley (Orange-2) on February 25th]