



To: House and Senate Appropriations Committees
From: Harmony Belle Devoe, Vice Chair of Vermont State Youth Council,
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Hello! My name is Harmony Belle Devoe, I am a junior at Harwood Union High School in Washington County, and I am Vice Chair of the Vermont State Youth Council and am on the Equity and Anti-racism Committee. I am here today to ask that the State Youth Council's funding be replaced by an appropriation of \$140,000 in state funds for fiscal year 2027.

I joined the State Youth Council in 7th grade, when the Council first began, because when I moved to Vermont from the Boston area, I began to notice the lack of representation of diverse identities. In my school, I observed racist remarks made in hallways and school buses and 'jokes' shared in classrooms. Growing up in a very diverse area and having frequent discussions about anti-racism at school and with my family, I saw a direct correlation between the lack of diversity and the way community members reacted when they did come across someone of an identity different from them. As someone wanting to use my unique perspective as a young person of color in my rural, predominantly white community in order to inform ways my new home called Vermont could be more welcoming, educated, and understanding, joining the Inaugural Vermont State Youth Council seemed like the perfect opportunity to do this, especially on the Equity & Antiracism Committee.

Since then, we have written and presented recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor, and have held public hearings to gather information from youth across Vermont, so we can represent not just ourselves, but every Vermont youth's needs. We recently set up a new Council schedule so we can make connections with legislative candidates, encourage legislators to introduce bills based on our recommendations, and testify and lobby for these bills to be passed, while still presenting our recommendations during the legislative session as written into Act 109 creating the council. This will let us turn recommendations highlighting youth concerns into policy-driven solutions.

Being part of the State Youth Council has allowed me and my fellow council members to become more informed citizens and constituents as we learned to navigate the legislative process, gain leadership skills to be used throughout our lives, increase our levels of passion and education on topics we care about, develop a stronger drive to benefit our communities through legislative work, and learn how to set

up a long-lasting institutionalized means of student advocacy to ensure Vermont youth's needs are prioritized in state-level policy.

It is essential for youth to be able to discuss issues using the terms of their choosing and be able to speak freely to fellow council members, their peers, and to policymakers. In a time when federal funding is being pulled, cut, and becoming scarce, it is critical for the VSYC to secure reliable state funding, thereby sending a clear message that Vermont's policymakers are dedicated to listening and supporting the state's young people.

This Council is important for the state of Vermont because youth make up approximately 24% of Vermont's population. If they were not rightfully represented in the legislature through the State Youth Council, this would mean a large number of Vermonters affected by legislators' decisions wouldn't have a say in it. By allowing youth to impact policymaking, the Vermont State Youth Council effectively bridges the gap between generations of leaders.

In order to make this a longer-lasting reality, we need the state funding to do so. In a time that federal funding for these kinds of youth-empowering programs is being pulled, I ask that State Youth Council's funding be replaced by an appropriation of \$140,000 in state funds for fiscal year 2027.

Thank you for your time.