

To: House and Senate Appropriations Committees
From: Leo Storm, Climate Change Committee member of Vermont State Youth Council,
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Date: 2/18/2026

Hello,

Thank you for taking time to consider my testimony. My name is Leo Storm, and I am from Brattleboro. I am a member of the Vermont State Youth Council. I am writing to ask you to appropriate \$140,000 of State funding in FY27 to support the Vermont State Youth Council and ensure the youth members can fully express themselves without censure.

The Youth Council makes recommendations to the general assembly regarding bills and initiatives to support, and provides feedback based on what youth in Vermont have expressed as priorities. I joined the Council this year, in the fall of 2025, and it has been one of the most impactful experiences of my high school career.

Vermont is a very special place to live, particularly as a young person. Vermont's rural character means that many of us are lucky enough to live or work in the same community as local and state legislators. In our public school system, Vermont ranks 3rd in the nation for expenditure per student, according to a 2024 report by the National Education Association. According to U.S News' 2024 rankings, Vermont is 12th for overall quality of education for K-12 students.

Like all places, certain issues affect towns and counties in Vermont deeply. Questions that are raised in the statehouse about addressing poverty, taxes, housing, or education have answers that affect youth. We see and navigate these issues every day, and have perspectives and ideas that can greatly elevate discussions and decision-making on the state level.

Young people have, time and time again, shown that we are passionate and driven to be involved in politics – and Vermont can and does support this. The combination of a strong education system, close-knit local communities, means that Vermont is in a particularly good place to encourage youth participation in government and politics. Two students serve on the State Board of Education, 8th graders can be involved as pages in the statehouse, and a 5th grader serves as Kid Governor. An extremely important opportunity for youth in statewide policy-making, which involves 28 young people each year, is the Vermont State Youth Council.

Being a member of the Council is a way that I can ensure that the experiences and wishes of youth in my community are taken into account in state policy. The structure of the Youth Council, comprising youth from all regions of Vermont, helps to ensure that the issues we tackle are relevant to the needs of the broader state and not just more populated or wealthier areas.



STATE YOUTH COUNCIL

In addition to assisting the legislative process, youth on the Council also learn skills that allow us to help our communities in the short-term and lead lives as valued public servants, officials, or organizers in the future. The most important skill I have gotten to practice on the Youth Council is collaboration. We observe how legislators overcome roadblocks in the statehouse, and we use the same negotiation and persuasion skills in our meetings. It is not easy to learn how to approach an issue with both intense passion and a willingness to compromise. I witness many of the adults in my life – teachers, politicians, and community members – struggle with that.

When I go to State Youth Council meetings, and I am able to practice collaborating with my peers about meaningful issues, I take those skills back with me to my home and school communities. Even from just my short time on the Youth Council, I find it easier to engage my classmates and neighbors in conversations about important and sometimes difficult issues. I am a more informed citizen, a better listener, and a more confident persuader.

It is important that the Youth Council does not rely solely on federal funding, because none of the benefits I've mentioned so far would be possible without complete freedom of speech for all Youth Council members. We are young people with all sorts of conflicting, compassionate, and crazy ideas. In order for the Council to function, we need to be able to express these ideas without fear of losing funding and without fear of censorship. We need to have ideas that don't cater to any politician or political party. The state of Vermont can provide this safety.

The unique prioritization of youth voice in Vermont means that we want to stay in this state and make positive change in our communities. Youth voice should continue to be a priority because we will, ourselves, be local and state representatives. We will, ourselves, be adult changemakers in the community. When we are able to inform policies now, we set our generation up for a state political climate where we won't have to waste time undoing policies that don't serve the people. Rather, when we are adults, we can focus on making new policies that help and serve all Vermonters.

Thank you for considering allocating \$140,000 in State funds for the Vermont State Youth Council for FY27.