



350Vermont Testimony to the Vermont House Energy and Digital Infrastructure Committee

Presented by Mieke Riddlebarger

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Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 753. My name is Mieke Riddlebarger, my pronouns are they/them, and I'm one of 350Vermont's Organizing Co-Directors.

350Vermont is a grassroots climate justice organization and a member of the Act on Climate coalition. 350VT is building a people-powered and people-led climate justice movement in Vermont for a just, thriving world. We are guided by the voices, experiences, and solutions of those most impacted by the global climate crisis. We strive to work at the intersections of the climate crisis and social justice to address the climate crisis equitably and effectively.

In 2024, 350Vermont advocated for H. 668, a ratepayer protection bill, which was later folded into Act 142 as an "energy cost stabilization study." This study directed the Public Utilities Commission to review existing programs to reduce utility costs, consider whether a statewide program is needed, and make a recommendation to the legislature on what this might look like. 350VT understood the importance of a statewide ratepayer protection program in 2024, and that importance has only grown in 2026 as the cost of living increases across the board, particularly for our most vulnerable populations. When the PUC began its investigation into the issue in early 2025, our volunteers and allies remained engaged in the process, submitting public comments and participating in the hearings held by the Public Utilities Commission. As you heard during testimony on Wednesday, the PUC's study did not address many of the concerns and recommendations brought forward during its investigation and declined to recommend a statewide ratepayer protection program.

However, the report did underscore the significant energy burden many Vermonters are facing, and it became extremely clear throughout the PUC's investigation that electric disconnections have been steadily increasing over the years, despite the assistance programs offered by some utilities. Being disconnected from your electric service alone often results in a ripple effect of problems, you lose power, you may not be able to charge a phone or laptop needed for work, if you use an electric stove you can no longer prepare meals, and even with a gas stove your fridge and freezer no longer work to keep food and medicine like insulin safe. What about people with complex health needs, like breathing machines or ventilators? What if you rely on electricity to heat or cool your home, especially during periods of extreme weather? H.753 would address these questions and increase protections for vulnerable Vermonters.

In addition to being here to represent 350Vermont and our volunteers, I'm also here as a resident of the Northeast Kingdom, an area particularly impacted by high energy burdens, climate disasters, and infrastructure unprepared for the slew of problems brought on by climate change. As I mentioned previously, some utilities offer assistance programs for low-income ratepayers, but many of our smaller utilities, particularly in rural areas, are unable to offer any assistance. Support systems like churches, free meal sites, and mutual aid networks in rural areas are straining as costs go up and more and more residents are in need of help. Many of our neighbors and many of us are one missed paycheck away from having to choose between heat, transportation, food, and medicine. Choices that no one should be forced to make.

H.753 is a crucial move towards an equitable, safe future and a Just Transition for Vermont. Thank you for your time and consideration.