

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here today to speak to [S.219](#).

I'm Johanna Miller and I lead the Energy and Climate Program at the Vermont Natural Resources Council. A big piece of my work is collaborating closely with committed community leaders who comprise the state's network of town energy committees. As you likely know, about ½ of the communities in Vermont – many in your districts – have mostly municipally appointed energy committees who've long been working to help their municipalities – as well as the households and businesses in their communities – save energy, save money and reduce reliance on the imported fossil fuels that are accelerating climate change and creating an increasingly destabilized planet.

From my community work, I've seen a lot of meaningful progress made with the leadership of a hard-working, informed network of volunteer energy committee leaders. Their efforts have helped get town halls weatherized and leaky homes buttoned up; they've helped get solar on schools and roofs, more efficient heating technologies in homes and businesses, and cleaner, more efficient vehicles on the roads – and far more. In that community work and beyond, including as a member of the Vermont Climate Council, I've also had the opportunity to work closely with Vermont's incredible network of clean energy partners – our efficiency utilities, like Efficiency Vermont, our community action agencies, our Regional Planning Commissions, our distribution and transmission utilities and many others. In short: I feel like I have a strong grasp of what the state has committed to doing on energy education, as well as to the good work of many pivotal partners and communities across the state of Vermont. From my perspective, we have a very strong foundation upon which to build – and far, far more work to do.

As you know, we are talking about a significant and essential transformation of our outdated energy system to a more renewable, local, affordable and distributed energy system – away from fossil fuels. This essential transition is being driven by two significant factors – the economics: Renewable energy is now the cheapest and fastest power to deploy. It is also driven by the environment: The climate crisis is intensifying – and fossil fuels are the primary reason. Inaction... slow action... puts the global economy, millions of people and far more at severe risk.

This is a transformation already well underway in Vermont and across the world. But to help *more* people reduce their energy bills and *actually* do our part on climate – especially as the federal government dangerously and shortsightedly doubles down on fossil fuels – there's a need to do more... *faster*. Which is where the work of energy navigation comes in, and why I very much appreciate you all taking up this bill and exploring what more can be done to support additional energy navigation services as a means to making that happen.

As you know, there is a strong network of key partners that are already supporting Vermonters in making good, well-informed energy decisions and investments – most are listed in S.219. I think many can agree that there are gaps in the state’s energy support system – and this bill and the PSD-led effort it envisions aims to help fill those gaps. So, in short: VNRC supports this bill and would respectfully suggest a few suggested changes and additions.

Suggested changes to S.219 as passed the Senate:

- Section 1(a) – **Add Energy Action Network**
- Section 1(a) SPECIFICALLY **ADD TRANSPORTATION, where ~40% of household costs and climate pollution come from** - The Department’s consultant shall build on findings from the Department’s comprehensive process and performance evaluation of more than 100 publicly funded energy programs focused on affordability, including electric and thermal efficiency, weatherization for customers with low income, and beneficial electrification initiatives, **including transportation**, to inform the design of a Vermont community-based home energy navigator and coaching program.
- Section 1(b)(3) assist residential consumers in prioritizing identified energy-saving opportunities, including through the integration of weatherization strategies to reduce heating and cooling loads that could minimize the need for the installation of new equipment and lower future electric demands on the grid; **ADD ELECTRIFICATION + FUEL SWITCHING**
- Section 1(b) **-- Consider ADDITION OF NEW SUBSECTION related to examining financing opportunities.**
- (c) On or before March 1, 2027, the Department shall submit a report on the program design to the House Committee on Energy and Digital Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.
- **RELATED TO** Section 1(c) On or **before March 1, 2027**, the Department shall submit a report on **RECOMMENDED** program design to the House Committee on Energy and Digital Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy – **CHANGE TO JANUARY 1, 2027 – and RECOMMEND program design (the Legislature should have input)**

So thank you for your work to explore this opportunity to leverage the partnerships we already have, the commitment and capacity of community energy leaders and potential promise of pilot programs like CEAC’s or other approaches to help more Vermonters benefit from cleaner, less costly and more efficient energy solutions.

There is significant interest in the CEAC pilot and greater navigation services in general from the communities I collaborate with. And I am... we are ... also really interested in exploring how we might better support the network of town energy committees – mostly all volunteers – in playing a more coordinated, impactful, trained role in expanded energy navigation work. A few more specific things I'd note, as it relates to the bill in front of you and in general:

- I think we have a strong base to work from – from the community level to the professional provider level – but I think there are still gaps in the current provision of services, partners and providers that we should fill to help many more VTers make informed energy decisions and investments and accelerate the transition to cleaner, less costly energy solutions more quickly. These support services are also critical to help busy Vermonters understand, navigate, access and benefit from potential incentives and programs that would help them afford investments in cleaner, less costly energy solutions – for low income VTers in particular.
- I've worked closely with the CEAC folks, including in their affiliation with Middlebury Energy Committee, and appreciate their leadership and efforts in this work and the pilot program they have been undertaking in Addison County. I look forward to working with them, you all and many others to see how we might build off and potentially further support their efforts and the successful elements of the pilot they are undertaking.
- Relatedly, the Energy Action Network, who I know you have heard from before, is also digging deeply into this very issue via the work of one of their collaborative "Network Action Teams." They are looking at energy navigation work – and they are currently interviewing 20+ partners, people and players to understand what types of energy navigation and support services are already happening in Vermont, what gaps in services or unmet needs there may be, and what Vermont might do to fill those gaps and accelerate clean energy investments. I am following that work, and it's my understanding that EAN plans to have their analysis in April. It's likely not ideal timing for the legislative calendar to inform this bill, but I imagine it will be a good body of work and analysis to build from.
 - Mike Roy could potentially speak to this more.
 - I would also suggest that EAN come in to speak about it. They could also potentially be a resource to support the study conceptualized in the bill.
- Lastly, we are abundantly aware of the significant budget challenges this year and that there are many important, competing priorities you all are looking to balance. I will leave those hard decisions up to you but want to underscore the value of this work.