

## Recommendations on Policies that Impact the Youths of Vermont

April 21, 2025

The Vermont State Youth Council was formed in 2022 with the purpose of giving “young Vermonters an official means of providing advice on policies that impact young persons in Vermont.”

The Council is currently composed of 26 youth and consists of five subcommittees: Climate Change; Education; Equity and Anti-Racism; Youth Mental Health; and Youth Voice. Each subcommittee is tasked with providing recommendations related to its focus area to the Governor and General Assembly alongside recommendations from the full Council “on the participation of young persons in Vermont's economy and keeping young Vermonters in the State” and “the preservation of Vermont’s traditions and the future of Vermont’s rural character, activities, and professions.”

In its short history, the Council has hosted one public hearing, sent a survey to Vermont students, written bylaws, and presented recommendations to the General Assembly and Governor. Moving forward, the Council will be changing its strategy to better align with the bienniums and legislative sessions. In the future, recommendations will be presented at the start of each biennium so the second year of the biennium can be entirely focused on connecting with legislators to write bills and provide testimony.

The Vermont State Youth Council allows youth and legislators to impact one another, bridging the gap between generations of leaders. The recommendations presented herein are centered around what the Council believes to be the issues most affecting Vermont youth.

Respectfully submitted,

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Vermont State Youth Council Chair

### 2025 Vermont State Youth Council

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## CLIMATE CHANGE

Human-induced climate change is a problem that affects all of us, both as Vermonters and globally. While the effects of climate change may look different here than anywhere else in the world, it will and is already affecting everyone. July 2023 was the warmest July on record for the earth. That same month, Vermont experienced catastrophic flooding, showing how natural disasters are becoming increasingly drastic. Not only are humans being affected by this, but every other species on the earth is as well. It is up to us to stop this before it's too late. Vermont may be a small state, but we have the power to make a difference. As youth, we will be the ones inheriting this world and its changing climate, and we believe we should be part of the process to stop it. Therefore, the Vermont State Youth Council recommends the following:

- With the vision to increase composting participation across the state, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to offer tax incentives for co-ops, garden centers, and other outdoor centers to take compost free**. The companies could profit from selling the soil while assisting the state. The state could provide buckets and an online map of drop-off sites
- To encourage leaning off fossil fuel usage in public transportation, the Council recommends that the General Assembly **pass legislation to have 75% of school buses and 100% of public transportation be electric by the year 2050**. This builds off of VTrans' current plan to have all buses electric by 2050.
- To raise an environmentally conscious generation within the state of Vermont, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to instill climate change into education by requiring it within the curriculum of science classes**. This could be done by the addition of a standard dedicated to the understanding of climate change.
- To protect Vermont's forests and keep stored carbon from being emitted into the atmosphere, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to conserve all current old growth forests in the state by 2040**. Because old growth forests store a large amount of carbon, this is essential to stopping climate change.

## EDUCATION

All Vermont youth deserve to have access to high-quality, inclusive learning opportunities. We strive for all Vermont youth to have a safe and equitable learning environment, thus creating a more enjoyable learning experience for all. Therefore, the Vermont State Youth Council recommends the following:

- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to allow students the opportunity through school choice, public to private or public to public, to learn in a different environment and setting that will better fit their needs**.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to increase specialist teachers and certified school personnel in the state**.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to provide more funding for state funded preschool—to increase the 10 hours that exist now to 25 hours**.

## EQUITY AND ANTI-RACISM

We believe all Vermont youth deserve to experience belonging and to have equitable access to opportunities to contribute toward community well-being. We also recognize many Vermonters (especially those with multiple marginalized identities) encounter systemic, cultural and interpersonal barriers to accessing these rights. Therefore, the Vermont State Youth Council recommends the following:

- **Require schools to carry out specific, direct, educational consequences for those who cause harm through an act of bias or prejudice.** These consequences should be suggested by individuals trained in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and can include lessons, presentations, workshops, Restorative Justice practices, and dialogues related to the topic of the discrimination. The Council recommends this strong effort to change the patterns of biased and prejudiced actions, without requiring victims to speak with their discriminator.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to require schools to provide and maintain for students a feeling of comfort, and obligation, in reporting discrimination they experience, and witness, and to provide an alternative way of reporting incidents other than verbally reporting to a teacher, to allow reporting students to maintain anonymity.**
  - Some examples are a box where students can write their reports and drop them in the box, or an email to a designated administrator/staff member.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **implement the following three recommendations for the education system as presented in the 2024 report of the Executive Director of Racial Equity to the General Assembly** (these three recommendations can be found on p. 19 of the document [p. 21 of the PDF] under appendix A):
  - a. Require Secretary of Education to work with the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards in Schools Advisory Working Group to develop and maintain a model curriculum on teaching against hate speech and hateful imagery/symbols, enabling students to recognize discrimination, and to provide teaching materials, technical assistance, and coordination to school districts and superintendents to implement.
  - b. Task the Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools Advisory Working Group with developing a model curriculum on hate speech/hateful imagery and a model policy on racial equity.
  - c. Require school boards to adopt a policy on racial equity at least as stringent as the model policy to be developed by the Secretary of Education.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **adopt a statewide equity plan as recommended in the 2024 report of the Executive Director of Racial Equity to the General Assembly** (details can be found on pp.13 and 14 of the report in Appendix B).
- In regards to English Language Learners, the Council recommends **if a student scores 4 in all language domains on the Access for ELL's testing for 3 years consecutively without placing out, their proficiency shall be reevaluated in a more holistic manner.** In this case, we task the ELL Teacher at the given school to assess the student's proficiency by surveying the student's teachers, counselors, and advisors as well as the student themselves to determine if they can be deemed proficient. This survey would evaluate a student's ability to complete assignments, participate in class, and to succeed in challenging courses in regards to their knowledge of English. This process can also be initiated upon request after 2 years of a student scoring 4 in all language domains on the Access for ELL's testing.



## YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

All Vermont youth must have access to high-quality mental health care. Therefore, the Vermont State Youth Council recommends the following:

- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to instate 3 forgiven mental health days per semester for middle and high school students in the state of Vermont. Students who have a diagnosis from a certified clinician would have 5 mental health days per semester. In schools that have a trimester system, students without a diagnosis would have 2 days, and students that have a clinical diagnosis would have 3–4 days.**
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to:**
  - **Award multi-year grant funding to teen centers that apply for it annually**
  - **Assure the teen spaces have high-quality staff and diverse and accessible opportunities**
  - **Fund the creation of new teen spaces**
- Due to the fact there are currently no eating disorder facilities for people under 15, and the ones in the state that do exist have chronically long wait times, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to fund the building of an inpatient eating disorder facility within the state of Vermont that accepts youth aged 11–17.**
  - If this is not possible for this biennium, the Council strongly encourages the General Assembly help fund/build the expansion of the Kahm Center in Burlington.

## YOUTH VOICE

All Vermont youth must know they will be asked, believed, and respected in making decisions important to and impacting them, thus having a voice in their lives and communities. Therefore, the Vermont State Youth Council recommends the following:

- The Council recommends the Governor **agrees to the repeal of the February 1, 2026 sunset period of Act 109 as included in the FY26 budget**. This repeal would allow the Vermont State Youth Council to continue to provide Vermont's youth with a platform to represent themselves in state politics.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass a resolution providing support and empowerment to municipalities extending voting rights to 16 and/or 17 year olds in local elections and town meetings**. This resolution would provide youth with a direct voice in government, giving way to a generation of youth with a stronger sense of civic responsibility.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass a resolution tasking the Vermont Agency of Education with creating a survey for students to evaluate their teacher's performances in class**. This survey would be given to students grades 6–12 at the midpoint and endpoint of each term of the school year. It will provide students with a voice in their school community, and teachers with professional development opportunities.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **adopt H.2 as introduced to increase the minimum age at which a child may be subject to juvenile delinquency proceedings from 10 to 12**.
  - Research indicates that younger children may not possess the cognitive maturity to fully comprehend legal proceedings. Raising the minimum age allows for the implementation of alternative measures, which can be more effective in addressing the underlying causes of juvenile misbehavior. Many jurisdictions are reevaluating the appropriate age for delinquency proceedings in light of developing human rights standards. Passing H.2 would position Vermont as a leader in adopting policies that reflect an understanding of juvenile justice.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly **adopt S.8 as introduced to expand eligibility for coverage under the Dr. Dynasaur program to all Vermont residents under 26 years of age or below 312 percent of the Federal Poverty Level**.
  - This expansion would provide a safety net toward those who may not have access to employer-sponsored insurance or those transitioning through differing educational and professional stages, ensuring their continuity of care during a formative stage of personal and professional development.



## On “the participation of young persons in Vermont's economy, keeping young Vermonters in the State, the preservation of Vermont’s traditions and the future of Vermont’s rural character, activities, and professions.”

More than ever, young people are looking to live and work in diverse communities with opportunities for jobs, recreation, and housing. Therefore, the Vermont State Youth Council recommends the following:

- The Council recommends the General Assembly **create a state fund for affordable housing in the state.**
  - To support this fund, the General Assembly should consider installing a “progressive” inheritance tax of 5% to be applied to Vermonters receiving an inheritance of \$250,000 or more. Another consideration would be to use revenue from the already existing estate tax for the affordable housing fund.
  - This tax money will go into a state fund for affordable housing, using different strategies such as utilizing abandoned buildings and dorms when empty, or building up instead of out.
- To uphold Vermont’s tradition of being a Green Mountain State, the Council recommends **the State of Vermont ensures its National Forests are protected from the federal threat of allowing them to be bought by private owners, or exploited for their resources.**
- To uphold Vermont’s tradition of being a direct democracy at the town level, the Council recommends Vermont public schools educate students on the history and importance of Town Meeting Day in the days and weeks leading up to it, and strongly encourage students to attend.
- The Council recommends **taxes are realistically payable and income-based.**
  - If an area has many out-of-state tax payers, the Council recommends the residents of that area are not subject to higher taxes, as is common in towns like Warren where, for example, the majority of homes are owned by out-of-staters, resulting in extremely high tax rates for residents in the town.
- The Council recommends **the Vermont Chamber of Commerce avidly promote local businesses and urge locals and tourists alike to support them, allowing for more local job opportunities.**
- To improve the health and food security of Vermont youth and to support Vermont’s farming tradition, the Council recommends **Vermont’s public schools are required (and assisted) to provide free school meals to all K–12 students, and to use a certain amount of food from local farms in school meals.**