

VERMONT STATE YOUTH COUNCIL

Recommendations on Policies that Impact the Youths of Vermont

February 11, 2026

Founded in 2022 by Act 109, the Vermont State Youth Council is a group of 28 youth aged 11 to 18, from all walks of life. The Council further consists of five subcommittees: Equity and Anti-Racism, Climate Change, Youth Voice, Youth Mental Health, and Education. Committees are tasked with the creation of recommendations related to their focus, which are then voted on by the whole Council. From there, the Council is tasked with providing these recommendations to Vermont's Governor and General Assembly, alongside recommendations on specific topics such as "the preservation of Vermont's traditions and the future of Vermont's rural character, activities, and professions" as well as "the participation of young persons in Vermont's economy and keeping young Vermonters in the state."

Over the past few years, the Council has held a public hearing, sent multiple surveys to Vermont youth, written and revised bylaws, and presented to the General Assembly and the Governor on two occasions. This year, we have moved forward with a new strategy for recommendation creation and presentation, which will better align with the legislative biennium. This strategy consists of presenting recommendations at the start of the legislative biennium, leaving the latter half of the biennium as time to connect with legislators, write bills, and provide testimony. The Council has also been ramping up its outreach to youth constituents, and is planning to hold several public hearings during and after the current legislative session.

The Council has been a key player in providing a platform for youth voice in government. It has allowed youth to have a real impact on each other and their futures as the leaders of tomorrow. The recommendations provided by the Council herein are a reflection of the most pressing issues affecting Vermont youth today.

Respectfully submitted,

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Vermont State Youth Council Chair

2026 Vermont State Youth Council

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CLIMATE CHANGE

The Vermont State Youth Council recommends the following:

- Offer tax incentives for co-ops, garden centers, and other outdoor businesses to accept compost for free and benefit from selling the resulting soil. Provide residents with compost buckets and establish a statewide online map of compost drop-off locations.
- Strengthen protection and stewardship of Vermont's forests and recreational trails through increased funding for maintenance, climate-resilient improvements, invasive species management, and post-storm recovery.
- Provide strengthened state support to the Vermont Trails Committee to help coordinate long-term trail planning, maintenance, and stewardship across all regions of the state.
- Prevent forest fragmentation and protect wildlife corridors by supporting conservation policies and land-use practices that maintain connected, healthy ecosystems.
- Support and expand youth environmental stewardship opportunities, engaging young Vermonters in trail work, forestry, conservation, and environmental monitoring (e.g., the Vermont Youth Conservation Corp and the Audubon Vermont's Youth Conservation Leadership Program).
- Improve sustainable management of high-use trail systems through better signage, visitor education, and targeted infrastructure upgrades to reduce erosion and protect sensitive habitats (e.g., boardwalks and rocky pathways).

EDUCATION

- While the State Youth Council supports certain aspects of Act 73, such as the funding formula, the Council recommends this law should not continue to be implemented in its current state without changes made in consideration of the following:
 - Distance and bus routes (2 hours is too long to spend on a bus and takes time away from extracurriculars. 45 minutes is more appropriate.)
 - Preserving Vermont communities and small schools
 - Stress on teachers, staff, administrators, and special education teachers
 - Economic cost and impact of closing schools (e.g., bussing, lay-offs, etc)
 - Youth feedback. There did not seem to be enough youth feedback about Act 73. This is concerning and a negative for this act.
- Financial Literacy and Life Skills (Home Economics) classes should be required in schools; additionally, it should be required that all High School students have access to alternative learning pathways (Tech Centers).
- Increase the number of specialist teachers (paraeducators, reading, writing and math interventionists, certified teachers, equity scholar, counselors/clinicians, Student assistance Provider, translators and ect.) in school

EQUITY AND ANTI-RACISM

- The Council recommends requiring the 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.*[As a committee, we recommend that schools be required to instate a curriculum that teaches these topics as part of a required class.]*
 - In addition, task the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards in Schools Advisory Working Group with developing a model curriculum on hate speech/hateful imagery and a model policy on racial equity.
 - Also 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 pages 13 and 14 of the report as well as Appendix B*).
- The Council recommends requiring schools to define the appropriate response for any incident of any level that occurs due to bias or prejudice, using both disciplinary and restorative actions. These consequences should be suggested by individuals trained in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, including lessons, presentations, workshops, Restorative Justice practices, and dialogues related to the topic of discrimination, in a strong effort to change the patterns of their actions, not just punish them, without requiring the victim to speak with their discriminator.
- In addition, the Council recommends the General Assembly pass legislation to require schools to provide and maintain a feeling of comfort and obligation for students when reporting discrimination they experience and witness. We also recommend passing legislation requiring schools to provide an alternative way of reporting incidents other than verbally reporting to a teacher.
- In regards to English Language Learners, the Vermont State Youth Council recommends that 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, the ELL Teacher should 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 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 ELLs testing.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

- 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 that is too much for this biennium, the Council strongly encourages the General Assembly to help fund/build the expansion of the Kahm Center in Burlington.
- The Council recommends instating 3 excused 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, there would be 2 days for students without a diagnosis, and 3–4 days for students that have a clinical diagnosis.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly pass legislation to:
 - Provide multi-year grant-funding for teen centers that apply for it annually
 - Ensure teen spaces have high-quality staff and diverse and accessible opportunities for all
 - Fund the creation of new teen spaces

YOUTH VOICE

- The Council recommends the General Assembly pass a resolution allowing municipalities across the state to extend voting rights to 16 and/or 17 year olds in local elections and town meetings
 - Such a resolution would provide youth with a direct voice in government, fostering a generation of youth with a stronger sense of civic responsibility, and ensuring Vermont's tradition of direct democracy at the town level will endure through a younger generation given an earlier opportunity to understand and value this civic practice.
- The Council recommends passing legislation directing the Vermont Agency of Education with creating a survey for students to evaluate their teacher's performances in class.
 - This survey would be presented to students grades 6–12 at the midpoint and endpoint of each term. Once the surveys are completed, shared with the respective teachers for review..
 - The survey would contain questions like: "How well does your teacher/instructor explain course material," using a 0–5 rating scale, with only a select few open-ended questions.
 - A survey like this could provide students with a voice in their school community, and teachers with professional development opportunities and growth.
- The Council recommends Senate Bill 8 be passed and signed into law to expand eligibility for coverage under the Dr. Dinosaur program to all Vermont residents under 26 years of age or below 312% of the Federal Poverty Level.
 - This expansion would provide a safety net for those without access to employer-sponsored insurance or who are transitioning through different educational and professional stages, ensuring continuity of care during these formative periods.
- The Council recommends the General Assembly refrain from pushing back the implementation of the Raise the Age Initiative, and follows through with the July 1, 2027 implementation date outlined in Act 4.

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.”

- The Council recommends the General Assembly create a fund for affordable housing in the state.
 - To support this fund, the General Assembly should consider installing an 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 would 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 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.
- 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.
- To uphold Vermont's tradition as the 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.
- 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.