

To: Senate Committee on Government Operations
From: Harmony Devoe, Vice Chair of Vermont State Youth Council,
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My name is Harmony Belle Devoe, I'm a junior at Harwood Union High School, and I live in Warren.

Each year, the Council is required to present recommendations on youth in Vermont's Economy and Keeping Youth in the State. Our first recommendation for this is, we request that the Council's federal funding be replaced by an appropriation of \$140,000 in State funds for FY27, to ensure youth council members have the right to fully express their identity and experiences without federal limits, so they can truly represent the diversity and perspectives of young Vermonters. The total includes \$47,000 in youth stipends; venue expenses and mileage reimbursement for in-person meetings; and costs associated with the administrative and technical assistance of Vermont Afterschool in support of the Council.

The Council also recommends the General Assembly create a state 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 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 direct democracy at the town level, we also recommend Vermont public schools be required to 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 that Vermont's public schools are to be 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.

The State Youth Council also has the ability to endorse bills we strongly believe will make Vermont a better state for youth, and the bills we are currently supporting are H.30, An act relating to the use of seclusion and restraint on children and youth in the custody of the Department for Children and Families, H.192, relating to prohibiting solitary confinement for children, H.511, relating to the admittance of federal immigration authorities into schools, and H.640, an act relating to adding voting student members to school district boards.



STATE YOUTH COUNCIL

Finally, the State Youth Council has the following updates and goals in order to be more responsive during the legislative session, increase input from youth, and focus more on advocacy:

We are currently implementing the strategy of creating biennial recommendations to better align with the legislative schedule and have more time to advocate and connect with policymakers during the legislative session. We have also launched a newsletter for youth and youth groups to stay updated on the State Youth Council and increase youth feedback to the Council, and we are planning to hold more Public Hearings to hear what youth want and need in Vermont to inform the Council's new biennial recommendations. We are planning to share our recommendations with legislators before the session begins, in order to find champions to introduce bills based on our recommendations, and then advocate, testify, and lobby for them during the legislative session.

As you reflect on our recommendations in order to incorporate them into your policymaking, we ask you to please notice if there are any recommendations you could do any of the following with at this time of the legislative session: Introduce it as a short-form bill, if the committee could take a bill off the wall and add the language from the recommendation in, or if there is a bill you are working on in committee that this language could fit into, or fit it as an amendment to any related bills. If so, please reach out to any of us, and if it would be useful, we would be happy to work on incorporating our recommendations into a bill with you. We would also be happy to look at any bills you want youth feedback or support on and endorse it or come in and testify for it.

We thank you very much for having us here today, and we hope to work with you in the future to make Vermont a better place for its Youth.