



Annual Report 2019



WE STRIKE FOR CLIMATE ACTION NOW!
VPIRG

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VPIRG

THE EARTH IS AN EGG
DON'T FRACK IT

OUR

OUR FUTURE

Letter from the Director



If you're like most VPIRG members, your first encounter with our organization was probably when a young person biked up your driveway or knocked on your door to talk about our work. Our intrepid summer canvassers are a familiar sight in cities and towns all across Vermont – and thanks to their dedication, VPIRG has grown over the years to have 50,000+ members and supporters around the state.

But the canvass is about more than building grassroots support (although I will brag that our canvassers had more than 40,000 face-to-face conversations with Vermonters in 2019!). It's also one of the many ways that VPIRG

gives passionate young people a voice and teaches them the skills they need to change the world for the better.

And that's a mission that feels more important than ever in these challenging times.

We know that if we're going to confront huge issues — like the climate crisis — we need to be investing in and developing the next generation of changemakers.

In the pages ahead, you'll read about the role our summer canvassers played in VPIRG's Campaign to Stop Single-Use Plastics, and the incredible leadership that young Vermonters are taking in the fight for bold

climate action. I'm continually inspired by watching these young leaders in action, and I'm sure you will be too.

Thank you, as always, for your support – and for your investment in our future.

Paul Burns

Executive Director

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About VPIRG and VPIREF

Founded in 1972, the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG) is the largest nonprofit consumer and environmental advocacy organization in the state. As a 501(c)4 nonprofit advocacy group, VPIRG conducts non-partisan public interest advocacy in support of priority public interest issues and campaigns and seeks legislative and policy solutions affecting Vermonters. Donations to VPIRG are not tax deductible.

VPIRG established the Vermont Public Interest Research and Education Fund (VPIREF) in 1975 as its 501(c)3 outreach and education arm in order to conduct independent research and public education on the range of issues on which we work. Donations to VPIREF are tax deductible.

For nearly 50 years, we have brought the voice of Vermont citizens to public policy debates concerning the environment, health care, consumer protection

and democracy. The common mission of VPIRG and VPIREF is to promote and protect the health of Vermont's people, environment and locally based economy by informing and mobilizing citizens statewide. VPIRG advocates and organizers use independent research, policy analysis, public outreach and grassroots mobilization to design and implement effective strategies for each of our campaigns.

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YOUTH & CLIMATE

VPIRG has long been concerned with both addressing the climate crisis and engaging and empowering youth, and in 2019 those two priorities intersected in new and inspiring ways.

While public concern about the climate crisis has been growing steadily for years, 2019 saw a

groundswell of support for more ambitious action in Vermont and around the world.

In fact, according to polling that we conducted in partnership with our friends at Vermont Conservation Voters, 76% of Vermonters now say they are either very worried or somewhat

worried about global warming, with 61% stating they are very worried about the topic. That's up from 35% of Vermonters saying they were very worried about global warming in 2016.

As concern has grown, so have calls for transformative legislative measures designed to address the

climate crisis. And some of the loudest and most urgent calls have come from young people.

It's not surprising that youth have been leading the charge for bold climate action

— after all, despite being least responsible for the climate crisis

“Scientists have clearly laid out the crisis we’re facing. Companies the world over have developed the solutions necessary to eliminate our climate pollution. And now the world’s youth are delivering an unambiguous call to action. To the leaders of our state and our world the question is clear – are you with the generation demanding they have a livable future, or are you with the fossil fuel industry?”

- Ben Ederly Walsh, VPIRG Climate & Energy Program Director

we face, they’re the ones who will experience the most devastating impacts.

Now more than ever, it’s imperative that we listen to these young leaders and elevate their voice.

And listening to young people is something that comes naturally to us here at VPIRG – you could say that youth organizing has been baked into our DNA ever since our founding on the University of Vermont campus back in 1972.

Whether working on high school and college campuses to mobilize and empower student leaders or hiring close to 100 young people every summer as part of our statewide canvass, we have a long track record of investing in Vermont’s young people and giving them the tools and resources they need to make their voices heard.

In 2019, we doubled down on these efforts to support young Vermonters in their calls for climate action – both in the State House and beyond.

In the spring, VPIRG worked to support the Vermont Youth Lobby, a grassroots coalition of youth

from around the state, in holding the fourth annual Rally for The Planet. Hundreds of students from across Vermont gathered on the State House lawn to demand meaningful action on climate change from state leaders.

The importance of fulfilling Governor Scott’s 2017 commitment to upholding the Paris Climate Accord was a rallying cry for participants, who repeatedly called on those in power to keep their promises. While Vermont has made a commitment to reducing emissions by 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2025 (in line with the Paris Climate Accord) and transitioning to 90% renewable energy by 2050, there’s simply no way these goals can be achieved if we continue with business as usual.



Young Vermonters also voiced concerns that legislators are moving too slowly to enact the types of policies necessary to ensure a livable future for youth in Vermont and beyond. And several of the day’s speakers invoked Swedish teenage activist Greta Thunberg in their remarks, lauding her blunt approach to demanding climate action from powerful leaders as inspiration for youth worldwide.

Greta’s growing global prominence guided another large, youth-driven climate event in 2019 – the Global Climate Strike on September 20th. VPIRG worked with campus organizers and local businesses including Seventh Generation, Burton, and Ben & Jerry’s to drive turnout for the Burlington climate strike – as well as encouraging our members throughout the state to join their local actions. The results were astounding. Thousands of Vermonters across the state participated – and an estimated 5,000 Vermonters turned out for the strike in Burlington.

And we didn’t stop there. In November, we supported young organizers from the Vermont

Youth Lobby in holding the first-ever Vermont Youth Climate Congress. More than 170 student delegates from 43 schools (as well as several Vermont homeschoolers!) gathered at the State House, where they drafted and ratified the Young Vermonters United Climate Declaration, calling on Vermont’s leaders to take decisive action to address the climate crisis.

There’s still a long way to go in ensuring that Vermont takes the necessary steps to appropriately address the climate crisis, but we’re confident that the momentum built by young people across the state will translate into positive action. And as the fight continues, we remain committed to giving young Vermonters a voice and teaching them the skills they need to change the world for the better.





VPIRG'S CAMPAIGN TO STOP SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

In 2019, VPIRG was the organization leading the way in the fight against single-use plastics in Vermont. The result? The enactment of the most comprehensive law in the entire nation dealing with throwaway plastics.

And we're just getting started.

The fact is, we have a plastics problem. Thanks to decades of unchecked consumption, plastic pollution can now be found everywhere from the most remote places on earth to within our own digestive tracts.

Frighteningly, half of all plastics ever manufactured have been

made in the past 15 years. And if you think the problem is bad now, production is expected to double again by 2050.

Single-use plastics like straws and plastic bags are especially pernicious. These “throwaway” products have a useful life of just minutes but can last in the environment for 500 years or more, choking waterways, killing wildlife, and threatening human health. Even worse, many of these plastic products contain harmful toxins that can leach into the food we eat and the water we drink.

Fortunately, momentum is building in the fight against single-use plastics, and Vermonters have

demonstrated their commitment to being leaders in this movement.

Here at VPIRG, we've been hard at work leading the charge against throwaway plastics, and 2019 saw some of our most significant victories to date.

As you may recall, back in 2018 we partnered with business owners and environmentalists to launch the “Straws Upon Request Pledge,” a statewide campaign aimed at reducing the number of single-use plastic straws used and thrown away in the state. The idea was simple: businesses that took the pledge would make straws available to their customers only upon request. Dozens of restaurants across the

state signed on, making a significant dent in their single-use plastic waste and saving money along the way.

At the same time, municipalities across the state were getting on board as well, with Wilmington, Manchester, Middlebury, Montpelier, and Burlington all making plans to tackle plastic pollution. And in the private sector, Vermont's own Ben & Jerry's announced plans in early 2019 to ban plastic straws and other single-use plastics from all its Scoop Shops worldwide.

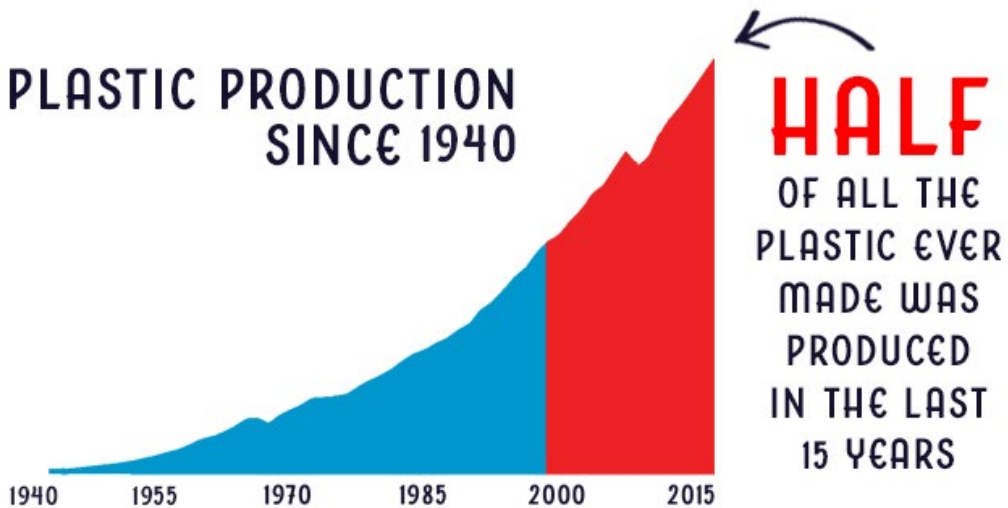
Inspired by this growing movement, we kicked off 2019 with the official launch of our Campaign to Stop Single-Use Plastics.



In 2019, VPIRG knocked on doors all across the state asking Vermonters to sign a petition asking lawmakers to support policies to stop single-use plastics – and more than 21,000 Vermonters added their names.



PLASTIC PRODUCTION SINCE 1940



During the 2019 legislative session, VPIRG led the charge in advancing S.113, the strongest anti-plastic legislation in the nation. Although the bill drew immediate fire from the plastics and chemical industries, VPIRG worked closely with our allies at Conservation Law Foundation, Vermont Conservation Voters, and Beyond Plastics to build support for the legislation.

We worked with legislators, delivered testimony, pushed back against industry misinformation and mobilized our members to demand action. Lawmakers ultimately passed the legislation with large majorities. But we

knew our work was just getting started.

In June, VPIRG organized a press event with legislative champions, business leaders and our entire summer canvass team, to call on the governor to sign the bill.

Despite intense lobbying and paid advertising by the plastics industry, the governor heeded the call of VPIRG, our allies, and thousands of Vermonters across the state and signed S.113 into law on June 17, 2019.

The new law (Act 69), which is set to take effect in July 2020, bans troublesome plastic carryout bags, plastic drink stirrers, and expanded

polystyrene food service products, makes straws available upon request in most establishments, and imposes a 10-cent fee on most single-use paper bags to encourage reusable bag use. Finally, it set up a working group to develop proposals for next steps to address plastic pollution.

But strong as the new law is, it only scratches the surface of the vast plastic pollution crisis.

That's why we dedicated our 2019 summer canvass to the issue

of single-use plastics, sending canvassers door to door in all 251 cities and towns in Vermont, where they spoke with over 37,000 Vermonters about the plastic pollution crisis and collected more than 21,000 signatures on a petition to lawmakers urging them to support policies that stop single-use plastics.

As we look to the future, we're committed to continuing to identify and advance new ways to combat the plastic pollution crisis, making Vermont a national leader on this important environmental issue.



VPIRG Member Profile: Sarah Kaeck



Given our focus on eliminating unnecessary single-use plastics, it only seemed right to profile a VPIRG member who's a true leader in that movement: Bee's Wrap founder Sarah Kaeck. Here's a bit of Sarah's story, in her own words... "When I first made Bee's Wrap, I was an avid bread baker. I was looking for an alternative for plastic wrap to cover my doughs, and the rest is history. These days I'm making a lot more Bee's Wrap than bread, but I still love to bake. I find a lot of inspiration in nature, so my family and I frequently hike and spend time outdoors together. I love our beautiful state, and I'm proud to have built my company here. Our company is built on robust sustainability goals, so joining VPIRG was a natural way for Bee's Wrap to act on its values. VPIRG's "Zero Waste" initiative celebrates the same core value on which I built Bee's Wrap. I wanted to eliminate single-use plastic from my own kitchen, and to provide alternative choices for consumers that also have long-lasting, positive environmental ramifications. VPIRG's current efforts for more aggressive single-use plastic legislation in Vermont is really important to me, and to Bee's Wrap."

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with Sarah and the Bee's Wrap community to bring increased awareness to the plastic pollution crisis.

GETTING CONNECTED:

A Q&A with Consumer Protection Advocate Zach Tomanelli on VPIRG's work toward affordable high-speed internet for all



In 2019 VPIRG stepped up its work to advocate for policies aimed at expanding affordable high-speed internet access for Vermonters. The result: the most significant broadband expansion law ever enacted by Vermont legislators. We spoke with Zach Tomanelli, who leads VPIRG's digital consumer protection work, to find out why VPIRG got involved, what the law will do, and what the landscape looks like for broadband expansion in Vermont.

Q: SO WHY IS VPIRG ADVOCATING FOR BROADBAND EXPANSION?

Well, to start with, it's clear that internet access is a public interest issue. Broadband connectivity is not a luxury, it's a necessity. It's how we conduct job searches, make important health decisions, maintain connections with friends and families, and become active participants in our democracy. And as technology advances (e.g. telehealth, e-commerce, etc), robust, high-speed connections

will be critical to our health, safety, and economic well-being. VPIRG actually has a long history of fighting for connectivity for Vermonters. In the 70s and 80s that meant universal phone service. And in 2019, that means fighting for high-speed internet.

Q: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT VERMONT FACES WHEN IT COMES TO BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY?

We're a rural state. It costs money to build out the infrastructure for high speed internet and areas, like Vermont, that are less dense are therefore less appealing to the large telecoms. Put another way, it's not profitable for them to build here.

That's a large part of the reason why more than 80% of Vermont addresses don't have access to true high-speed internet (what we'd define as at least 100/100 mbps speeds), more than 20% don't have access to the federal definition of broadband (25/3 mbps – basically the minimum speed you'd get with a cable connection) and a full 7% of households – or 20,000 – have dial-up speeds or worse.

That's also why VPIRG believes jumpstarting community-owned broadband efforts is the key to addressing Vermont's connectivity issues. Because they don't need to satisfy shareholders, community-owned networks are

better able to provide universal service — reaching the houses that aren't profitable.

These networks are much more consumer-friendly than the giant telecoms. On average, they're more affordable and provide better speeds than large telecoms while prioritizing bedrock consumer protection principles like net neutrality and user privacy.

Q: IN 2019, VERMONT ENACTED A LAW (ACT 79) AIMED AT EXPANDING BROADBAND IN THE STATE. WHAT ROLE DID VPIRG PLAY IN THAT PROCESS?

Well to start I'd note that Act 79 was the result of a lot of hard work by a lot of different individuals who have been working for years to improve connectivity in Vermont. That includes many individual broadband activists, community-broadband specialists including the folks from ECFiber who have provided a model of how to do community-owned internet in Vermont, and certain legislators who have really championed this issue.

Broadband expansion has been something that has been talked up for many years in Vermont but hasn't seen a lot of traction. Last year, VPIRG advocates tracked the bill throughout the legislative process – pushing for the strongest possible provisions to bolster community-owned

internet startups in Vermont. We testified on the bill, arguing for its passage and suggested improvements, many of which were ultimately included. And, perhaps most importantly, VPIRG members contacted their elected officials en masse to let them know that expanding broadband access in Vermont must be a priority. Ultimately this made a huge difference as the bill passed both the House and Senate with overwhelming tri-partisan support.

Q: SO, WHAT DOES ACT 79 DO?

It does a lot of things – but perhaps most crucially it significantly increases the funding for local internet startups and it does this by establishing a state revolving loan fund to help these startups succeed.

Act 79 also reforms Vermont's pole attachment rules, cutting red tape that is currently preventing local internet service providers from building the infrastructure necessary to bring high-speed Internet to unserved Vermonters.

Finally, the bill raises the bar on the internet speeds required for projects receiving state funding – ensuring that we provide Vermonters with service that meets their needs and prevent state dollars from subsidizing the construction of outdated technology.

FIGHTING FOREVER CHEMICALS:

VPIRG, ALLIES STEP UP TO PROTECT VERMONTERS FROM PFAS

In many ways, 2019 was a banner year for efforts to protect Vermonters from harmful chemicals - an effort spearheaded by VPIRG, our members, and allies in the environmental community.

Lead in school drinking water, dangerous paint strippers, toxic chemicals in children's products: In 2019, we secured a number of sweeping victories to deal with these threats (see Page 12).

And perhaps top among these victories was the enactment of a landmark law establishing drinking water standards for five PFAS chemicals.

This victory warrants special recognition because of the pernicious nature of these chemicals and the threat they pose in Vermont.

PFAS, or poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances, are toxic chemicals that have been widely used in

industry and consumer products since the 1950s. Known as "forever chemicals" because of their long lifespan, PFAS have been shown to increase cancer risk, impair immune system functioning, and negatively impact fertility, hormone health, and early childhood growth and development.

In 2016, testing found elevated levels of PFOA (a type of PFAS chemical) in hundreds of wells in Bennington County, close to the former ChemFab plant, which manufactured Teflon coating for over 30 years and released PFOA into the environment. Since then, elevated PFAS levels have been found in drinking water at a number of other locations around the state, including at sites in Grafton, Pownal, and Clarendon.

Since that discovery, VPIRG has fought hard to enact reforms to protect Vermonters from future exposure to these chemicals, hold

the toxic polluters responsible for their release accountable, and provide relief to Vermonters who have been exposed.

That's why VPIRG, our members, and our allies (notably, the Conservation Law Foundation) pushed for the enactment of legislation in 2019 to establish a drinking water standard for these chemicals. The work of our advocates inside the State House and the calls and emails to lawmakers from our members paid off - as the best-in-the-nation legislation passed both chambers with near unanimous support (135 to 1 in the House, and 29 to 0 in the Senate) and was signed into law by the governor.

In addition to establishing the standard for five PFAS chemicals, the law (Act 21) works to address the impact of PFAS chemicals on surface and drinking water statewide by instituting comprehensive testing for PFAS

at public water systems, requiring a statewide investigation of PFAS sources, evaluating the regulation of PFAS as a class or subclasses, and providing the Agency of Natural Resources with additional tools to protect Vermonters from contaminated water sources.

Since testing began, officials have already identified three public water systems (Fiddlehead Condominiums in Fayston, Killington Mountain School, and Mount Holly School) with PFAS levels above the state standard. In the case of Mount Holly Elementary School, tests found the school's water contained PFAS contamination at more than 16 times the state limit.

These findings both demonstrate the benefit of the expanded testing we fought for as well as the clear need for further action to limit exposure to these dangerous chemicals. And VPIRG will continue to fight for that action.



*In addition to helping enact a landmark law to establish a drinking water standard for 5 PFAS chemicals—**VPIRG, our members, and allies achieved a number of significant victories in 2019 to protect Vermont’s people and environment from harmful substances, including:***



Improving the Toxic Free Families Act to provide consumers more information about whether a children’s product contains a known toxic chemical and streamlining the process to get dangerous children’s products off our shelves.



Responding to the discovery of elevated levels of lead in Vermont school drinking water by enacting the nation’s strictest standards for testing water taps in all Vermont schools and childcare centers and remediating any tap testing above 4 parts per billion of lead.



Classifying neonicotinoids (insecticides that threaten bees) as restricted use – meaning only those who are certified to use the chemicals would be able to purchase and apply them.



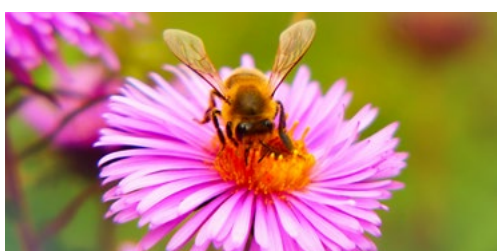
Joining a lawsuit against the Trump EPA for failure to act on deadly methylene chloride paint strippers.



Passing legislation (that was ultimately vetoed by Gov. Phil Scott) to provide long-term medical monitoring for victims of toxic chemical exposure paid for by the polluters responsible for the exposure.



Our 2019 Accomplishments



Vermont Passes Pesticide Restrictions to Protect Pollinators

Neonicotinoid insecticides threaten pollinators all over the Green Mountain State. This has serious implications for all of us – when bee populations decline that means trouble for our food system.

In the absence of federal leadership, a number of states have stepped up to pass legislation protecting pollinators. In 2019, Governor Scott signed into law Act 35, a VPIRG-supported bill that classifies neonic pesticides as restricted use – meaning only those who are certified

to use the chemicals would be able to purchase and apply them.

VPIRG Celebrates Historic Toxics Victory

After fighting for years to advance legislation to better protect children from toxic chemicals in products that are made specifically for kids, VPIRG scored a hard-won victory when Governor Scott signed into law a bill (S.55) that he had previously blocked as both governor and lieutenant governor in its earlier iterations.

The new law (Act 75) makes important changes to the Chemicals of High Concern to Children (Act 188) program. It will make more information available to parents and other consumers about whether a children's product contains a known toxic chemical. The law will also streamline the process by which the Commissioner of Health, after consulting with a diverse stakeholder group, can move to ban or otherwise regulate the use of harmful chemicals in children's products.

Thanks to the new law, Vermont will now have one of the most comprehensive databases in the country linking individual children's products with specific chemicals of concern. However, there is much more work to be done to make the information more easily accessible to consumers, and VPIRG is committed to continuing to work with our allies to push for stronger protections against toxic chemicals for Vermonters of all ages.

“It should not have taken five legislative sessions to better protect children from toxic chemicals in their toys, clothing or other items. I’m grateful to all of the parents and legislative champions who never gave up fighting for this despite the entrenched opposition of chemical manufacturers and industry lobbyists.”

- Paul Burns, VPIRG Executive Director

Vermont Passes Nation’s Strongest Legislation Protecting Against Lead in School Drinking Water

In 2019 VPIRG helped enact Act 66, a landmark law protecting against lead in school drinking water that was originally introduced after a statewide testing pilot program found elevated lead levels in the water at several Vermont schools.

Lead is a potent neurotoxin, and exposure to even very low levels can result in lifelong, irreversible consequences. Children are especially susceptible, and lead exposure can cause attention disorders, loss of IQ, delayed learning, and behavioral, kidney, and hearing problems.

The law requires testing of water taps in all schools and childcare centers in the state and mandates remediation for any tap that tests at or above 4 parts per billion of lead. All testing must be completed statewide by December 31, 2020.

Environmental advocates, including VPIRG, had originally pushed for the action level to be set at 1 part per billion, in keeping with recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Even so, the law represents the strongest standard of lead protection for children in the country.

“There’s really only one kind of water we should be giving our kids in schools and child care centers, and that’s unleaded. This new law moves us much closer to that goal.”

– Paul Burns, VPIRG Executive Director

VPIRG Secures More Funding for Weatherization

Weatherizing Vermont’s old housing stock is an essential element of any plan to address our state’s rising greenhouse gas emissions. Thanks to VPIRG’s hard work on this issue, Vermont is now taking a small step in the right direction with the enactment of Act 62.

Under the new law, Vermont’s energy efficiency utility, Efficiency Vermont, will allocate funds left over from electric bill efficiency charges toward weatherization incentives for low- and moderate-income Vermonters. The law also directs the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to open a proceeding to assess how Vermont can approach efficiency differently to accelerate progress towards our climate and energy goals – and how best to fund that work.

Our goal in 2019 had been to secure the funding needed to double the number of low- and moderate-income homes weatherized every year in Vermont, from 2,000 to 4,000. That would have needed roughly \$11 million in new, ongoing funding. Between the budget and Act 62, the legislature eventually passed a little less than half of that – almost all of it one-time funding, meaning we’ll have to continue pushing to accelerate the rate of weatherization.

Vermont Expands and Improves Broadband Access

VPIRG has long been committed to addressing Vermont’s connectivity issues and moving Vermont much more rapidly toward universal coverage.

In 2019, Governor Scott signed into law Act 79 - the VPIRG-backed broadband expansion legislation – that represents the most significant set of policies in years to expand and improve broadband internet access throughout the state.

The new law increases the funding needed to boost state government support for local internet startups and establishes a state revolving loan fund to help these startups succeed. It also reforms Vermont’s pole attachment rules, cutting red tape that is currently preventing local internet service providers from building the infrastructure necessary to bring high-speed Internet to unserved Vermonters.

Finally, the bill raises the bar on the internet speeds required for projects receiving state funding – ensuring that we provide Vermonters with service that is commensurate with their needs and prevent state dollars from subsidizing the construction of outdated technology.



VPIRG Helps Ensure Electric Vehicle Affordability

In late 2019, Vermont’s Agency of Transportation announced the launch of a new statewide electric vehicle incentive program as legislatively mandated through a VPIRG-backed provision in the 2019 Transportation Bill. This new incentive program will help low to moderate income Vermonters make the much-needed transition from internal combustion engines to cleaner vehicles, helping to reduce climate pollution in Vermont.

Vermont Passes Legislation to Phase Out Hydrofluorocarbons

Hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, are an entirely man-made class of chemicals used primarily for cooling and refrigeration. Though originally introduced as an alternative to ozone-depleting substances, HFCs are powerful greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

In 2019 the governor signed into law Act 65, which sets a schedule for phasing out the use of hydrofluorocarbons statewide—an important move that will help curb the recent spike in atmospheric concentrations of HFCs.

VPIRG Leads Charge in Fight Against Single-Use Plastics

In 2019 VPIRG led the charge for bold legislation to address plastic pollution, successfully pushing for the enactment of Act 69, the toughest anti-plastics legislation yet on the statewide level.

The new law, which goes into effect on July 1, 2020, bans troublesome plastic carryout bags and imposes a 10-cent fee on most single-use paper bags to encourage reusable bag use. It also bans plastic drink stirrers and expanded polystyrene food service products and makes straws available upon request in most establishments. Finally, it set up a working group that met throughout the fall of 2019 to develop ideas for next steps to address plastic pollution.

Vermont Takes Action Against Harmful “Forever Chemicals”

VPIRG and our allies advocated for a landmark law (Act 21) establishing drinking water standards for five perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) – toxic chemicals that have been widely used in industry and consumer products since the 1950s.

This law works to address the impact of PFAS chemicals on surface and drinking water statewide by instituting comprehensive testing for PFAS at public water systems, requiring a statewide investigation of PFAS sources, evaluating the regulation of PFAS as a class or subclasses, and providing the Agency of Natural Resources with additional tools to protect Vermonters from contaminated water sources.

VPIRG Joins Suit Against Trump EPA for Failure to Act on Deadly Paint Strippers

After the death of more than 60 people from exposure to methylene chloride paint strippers, the EPA proposed a ban on these lethal chemicals in 2017. Unfortunately, the Trump EPA has violated its public commitments and legal obligations by failing to finalize that ban, leaving consumers and workers exposed to the chemical’s dangers. In 2019, VPIRG joined a suit against the Trump EPA for failure to act on these deadly paint strippers. We are committed to continuing to fight to protect workers and bystanders from the harmful impacts of methylene chloride exposure.

Court Rules in Our Favor on Toxic Substances Control Act

Back in 2017, VPIRG joined with our allies at Safer Chemicals Healthy Families and the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization to file a lawsuit challenging Trump administration rules for evaluating the risks of toxic chemicals under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA).

In 2019, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit found that the EPA had violated the TSCA and determined that the EPA must fix its ongoing risk evaluation to better protect workers and consumers.

We are proud of this victory and will continue to fight to hold the Trump EPA accountable.



Executive Director Paul Burns enjoys a bottle of Honey Bunch with Jen Kimmich, co-founder of the Alchemist Brewery, and a VPIRG board member.

We Made a Beer!

Well actually, our brewing genius friends at The Alchemist made the beer, but VPIRG is thrilled to have helped conceive Honey Bunch. This delicious small batch beer was designed to showcase Vermont honey sourced from pollinator habitats at local solar farms tended by Bee the Change, a Vermont-based family farm that transforms unused space in solar fields into a rich habitat for bees and other pollinators.

To create this unique dessert beer, Bee the Change supplied The Alchemist with over 110 pounds of their solar-grown honey. That represents the life’s work of over 60,000 bees traveling over 6,000,000 miles to collect nectar from over 220,000,000 flowers.

You might remember that in 2018 we helped pass a law establishing in state law a pollinator-friendly habitat label on solar farms, recognizing solar installers that are leading the way in protecting and promoting pollinator species.

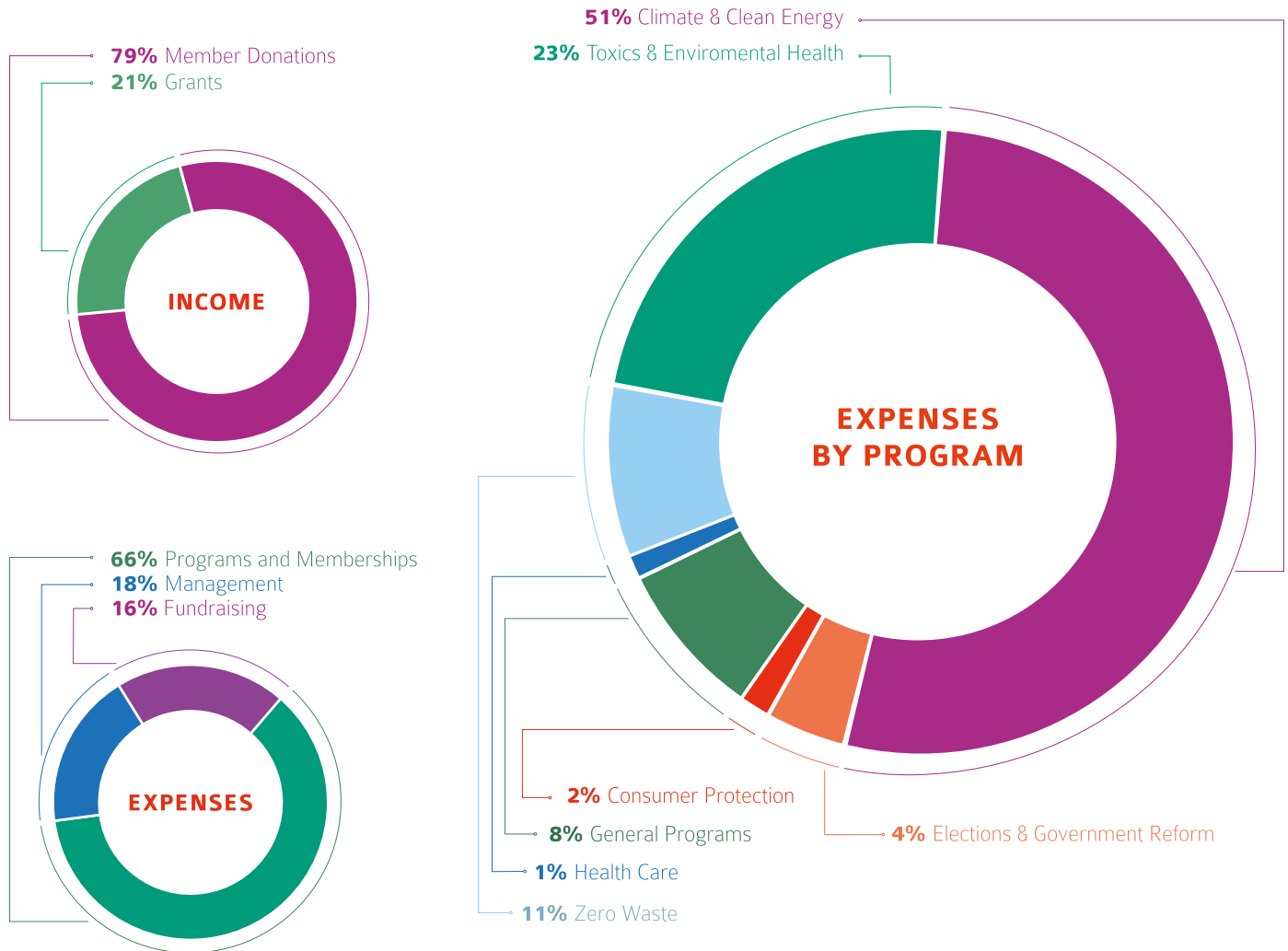
That law will mean more pollinator-friendly solar farms in Vermont and that means more solar-grown honey like the kind used in Honey Bunch!

Powered by You: Our 2019 Finances by the Numbers

In 2019, thousands of Vermonters supported VPIRG with grassroots contributions. The big-money special interests don't fund groups like ours, and we wouldn't take their money if they did. VPIRG is a people-powered organization and proud of it. Your support allows VPIRG to continue to educate thousands of Vermonters every year about the critical issues we face and then mobilize them in support of solutions that advance the public interest. So thank you.

VPIRG and VPIREF combined income totaled \$2,268,799 of which more than \$1.8 million came from individual member donations, 41% of that coming from our monthly sustaining members. Combined expenses totaled \$2,179,309. Program expenses and member services accounts for two-thirds of our expenses.

	VPIRG	VPIREF	TOTAL
Income	\$1,524,982	\$743,816	\$2,268,798
Expenses	\$965,784	\$1,213,525	\$2,179,309



Student Trustees

In 2019, VPIRG was excited to welcome two new student trustees to our board: Anna Marchessault and Talia Crowley.



Anna Marchessault

Born and raised in Burlington, Vermont, Anna received an associate degree from the Community College of Vermont before transferring to the Rubenstein School at the University of Vermont, where she is currently studying Natural Resource Ecology. Anna has worked with VPIRG as a summer canvasser and a field manager, and is active with the VPIRG Club on the UVM campus. She has a long history of interest in community engagement and sustainability, which has led her to get involved with political campaigns and other volunteer experiences both in Vermont and abroad. Anna believes that it's crucial for young people to have a voice in shaping our response to the climate crisis, and is eager to continue advocating for and empowering young Vermonters as a student trustee.

Talia Crowley

Talia is a student at the University of Vermont, where she is double majoring in economics and environmental studies and minoring in Public Policy Analysis. She first became involved with VPIRG as a summer canvasser and has since worked as an intern and served as Co-President (and founding member) of the VPIRG Club at UVM. She grew up in the suburbs of New York City, had a weekend job as a ski instructor at Mad River Glen in Fayston, Vermont, and spent her summers living with family friends in a small town located on the border of Yellowstone National Park in West Yellowstone, Montana – a diverse combination of experiences that exposed her to a broad range of perspectives and taught her listening and communication skills that have served her well as a canvasser. As a student trustee, she is excited to support the work of an organization that holds values mirroring her own.



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Note: While we wish we could thank every single member in this annual report it's impossible to list the thousands of VPIRG supporters statewide. The generosity of those listed in this report deserves special recognition.

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