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Vermont's Initial Climate Action Plan Provides Important Foundation for Progress

Montpelier, VT -- Earlier today, Vermont's Climate Council adopted the state's first-ever statutorily required Climate Action Plan.

Established by the Global Warming Solutions Act passed by the Vermont Legislature last year, the 23-member Vermont Climate Council was charged with crafting a plan to meet Vermont's legally required climate pollution reductions, while advancing equity and building resilience to the impacts of the climate crisis across Vermont. Today, in an overwhelmingly affirmative 19-4 vote, the initial required Climate Action Plan was adopted, which included the support of several members of the Scott Administration. Last year, Governor Scott aimed to scuttle the entire endeavor and vetoed the bill. The Legislature overrode that veto, requiring the administration to commence this now state-embedded, ongoing process.

"Vermont has both a legal and a moral obligation to cut climate pollution in a way that advances equity and justice, and at a pace that recognizes the scale and severity of the climate emergency," said **Ben Edgerly Walsh, Climate & Energy Program Director for the Vermont Public Interest Research Group**. "While the plan falls short in some ways and far more work must be done to engage Vermonters and turn the policies advanced in this plan into real, tangible actions, its adoption lays the foundation for Vermont to finally treat this crisis with the seriousness it demands and get on track to meet our climate requirements."

Since its inception, the Council has been working to meet the statutory deadline of releasing an initial Climate Action Plan on December 1st, 2021 - a requirement it met with today's adoption. Advocates and members of the Council have made clear throughout the process that following the initial Plan's adoption, far more outreach, public engagement, and consideration of public input is necessary - particularly from historically marginalized populations.

"This initial plan culminates a year's worth of hard work by Council members, subcommittee leaders and thousands of Vermonters," said **Vermont Natural Resources Council's Energy & Climate Program Director and Vermont Climate Council member Johanna Miller**. "This is an important milestone, and so many people deserve sincere thanks for getting us to this moment. At the same time, there is even more difficult work ahead to turn this plan into the bold, just climate action the intensifying climate crisis demands. That will require more meaningful,

ongoing engagement with many more Vermonters -- especially historically marginalized and overburdened Vermonters -- in the coming months and years. And it will require the actual implementation of transformative, equitable and cost effective solutions.”

Key policies advanced in the initial Climate Action Plan include:

- a clean heat standard, analogous to a renewable energy standard for the heating sector;
- a dramatically-scaled up weatherization program that will help many more Vermonters - particularly lower income and historically marginalized Vermonters - access weatherization services to cut their heating bills and have healthier and more comfortable homes while also cutting their climate pollution;
- a suite of transportation investments to help people access clean and affordable transportation options, and a recommendation to adopt California’s Advanced Clean Cars II and Advanced Clean Trucks rules to help drive innovation and market deployment of more clean, efficient vehicles
- a recommendation to adopt an environmental justice policy; and
- adoption of a suite of smart growth policy priorities that will support more climate-resilient communities through well-sited housing and other development in compact community centers, paired with stronger protections for our forests, farmland, wetlands, rivers and other vital natural resources.

The announcements from Massachusetts and Connecticut in recent days that they would not currently be implementing the Transportation and Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P), which the Council had included as its highest-impact recommendation in the transportation sector in earlier drafts of the Plan, took that cap and invest action off the table in the near-term in Vermont as well. The Council acknowledged the gap that was left in the Plan, and specifically laid out its intent to adopt an updated Plan no later than June of 2022 supporting additional necessary actions in the transportation sector. The Council also left open the option for Vermont to participate in TCI-P or another cap-and-invest program for the transportation sector and urged quick legislative action to set the table for receiving potential revenue from any such program, while establishing criteria and a process for cost-effective, equitable transportation investments.

“Climate change poses an existential threat to Vermont’s businesses and our overall economy, not in the distant future, but today. On the other hand, bold climate action is an unprecedented opportunity to create thousands of family sustaining jobs and keep billions of dollars flowing in our local economies,” said **Jordan Giaconia, Public Policy Manager at Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility**. “The Climate Council’s initial plan is a fantastic step forward, but there’s still much more work to be done to bring it to fruition. Transportation in particular is key to our economic growth yet our current system creates significant challenges for vulnerable Vermonters and is one our state’s largest sources of climate pollution. That makes it imperative to invest unprecedented state and federal dollars in cost-effective and equitable transportation solutions in the near term and pursue and implement more lasting solutions like the Transportation & Climate Initiative - Program in the future.”

“While REV is encouraged that the Council acknowledged the need to move towards a future where 100% of Vermont’s electricity comes from carbon free or renewable resources, we believe further action is needed now to combat the climate crisis,” said **Peter Sterling, interim Executive Director at Renewable Energy Vermont**. “Meeting Vermont’s energy and climate targets must be consistent with the principles of additionality laid out in both the Paris Accords and the Global Warming Solutions Act. And that should require 100% of Vermont’s electricity coming from renewable resources by 2030 with much higher requirements for newly built renewables than we have today, including at least 25% of that energy coming from clean, reliable and resilience-creating in-state renewable energy sources.”

“We thank the Climate Council for the immense amount of work they put into crafting the initial Vermont Climate Action Plan. While many of the details must still be worked out, and much more community input must be gathered, the plan provides an important blueprint to the Legislature. The Plan makes clear that the administration and lawmakers can and must take strong action to meet our climate pollution reduction, equity, and resilience targets,” said **Lauren Hierl, Executive Director at Vermont Conservation Voters**.

Hierl added, “We must dramatically increase the number of homes and businesses we’re weatherizing - particularly for historically marginalized Vermonters. We must require a transition to clean heat technologies. We must invest in clean and affordable transportation options. We must require more clean, in-state renewable energy. We must adopt an environmental justice policy. And, we must adopt climate resilience policies that will foster smart growth development in our communities while protecting our forests, waters, wetlands, and wildlife. With unprecedented federal funding available, and hopefully more on its way from the Build Back Better Act, we have no more excuses, and no time to lose. We must get to work implementing the solutions laid out in the Climate Action Plan that will help all Vermonters benefit from the clean energy economy.”

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