

Letter from the Director

I've had the pleasure to serve as VPIRG's executive director for over 20 years. That means that I've written many of these letters introducing our Annual Report, reflecting on the previous year.

Every year, I find it inspiring to recount all that we've achieved together – to protect and promote the public interest in Vermont. I'm consistently amazed by the accomplishments of our outstanding staff, our allies and, of course, members like yourself.

This past year was no different as, together, we were able to:

- Launch an exciting new grassroots campaign aimed at getting thousands of Vermonters to use their voices for climate action
- Secure landmark legislative victories for the public interest including generational funding for climate solutions and the enactment of Vermont's first environmental justice law
- Build momentum for key VPIRG priorities like modernizing the Bottle Bill and bringing Ranked Choice Voting to Vermont
- And so much more that you can read about in these pages.

However, 2022 will always stand out as being particularly special, because last year we celebrated VPIRG's 50th anniversary. You can read about that amazing event in this report as well.

But I do want to highlight here just what a remarkable milestone this is. Not every organization that seeks to do good in the world lasts 50 years. It's not easy taking on powerful special interests year in and year out – and depending on our grassroots supporters across the state to do so.

But I'm proud to say that 50 years on, VPIRG has not only survived, but is thriving thanks to all of the hard-working people who have staffed and volunteered for this organization over the years and the incredibly generous members who have supported our work.

I'm grateful for all that we've accomplished so far and committed to the work that lies ahead. Onward,

Paul Burns

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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, runs grassroots campaigns and seeks legislative and policy solutions to some of the most pressing issues facing 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 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 individuals and communities across the state. 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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VPIRG Brings Thousands of Vermonters into the Climate Conversation with 'Keep Vermont Cool' Campaign

(II)



For years, addressing the climate crisis has been the top priority for VPIRG, and in the past couple decades we have earned some critical victories in this fight.

However, in recent years it's become clear that if we're going to convince our elected officials to move forward on big, transformational policies that dramatically reduce Vermont's climate pollution while ensuring that all Vermonters have the opportunity to access cleaner, cheaper energy options, then we're going to need to change the narrative on climate here in Vermont.

That belief led us, in 2022, to launch our largest ever grassroots effort to mobilize Vermonters for climate action: our Keep Vermont Cool campaign.

Keep Vermont Cool was premised on a basic idea: We know that climate change is happening, we know that most Vermonters are concerned about it, and we know the kind of policies our elected leaders must pursue so that every Vermonter can take part in and benefit from the climate solutions at our fingertips. What's been lacking is the political will to enact those policies.

Polling conducted by VPIRG in 2021 gave us some critical insight into why that political will has been lacking. That polling showed that even though more than two-thirds of Vermonters were either alarmed or concerned about the climate crisis, only 6% were taking political action to address it.

Enter Keep Vermont Cool. This was and is a campaign unlike anything we've ever run. Rather than mobilizing Vermonters in support of a single climate policy – Keep Vermont Cool has worked to identify Vermonters who are alarmed about the climate crisis but unsure how to use their political power and bring their voices into the climate conversation. The campaign has been a massive success activating over 15,000 Vermonters, 10,000 of whom are brand new to the climate movement. From March through September of 2022, we did this by:







Connecting with Vermonters online – through a massive digital recruitment effort.

Having hundreds of conversations at events all across Vermont: farmers markets, concerts, fairs, soccer games – if we could set up a table at it, we did.

Knocking on over 60,000 doors as part of our summer door-to-door canvass operation, connecting with Vermonters in every corner of the state.





As the calendar turned to November, the Keep Vermont Cool campaign worked to keep the conversation going and build momentum for serious climate action in 2023 by holding a statewide Climate Action & Advocacy Tour: a series of 15 interactive workshops in every corner of the state giving the Vermonters we had brought into the climate movement over the summer the opportunity to connect with local legislators, hear about potential climate action in the upcoming legislative session, and make their voices heard.

It's no exaggeration to say that Keep Vermont Cool has brought a spark to Vermont's climate movement unlike anything we've ever seen, and we have no intention of slowing down. The Keep Vermont Cool team intends to keep having those conversations with Vermonters and bringing more people into the effort—because that's what it's going to take to ensure Vermont does its part to tackle climate change.

Keep Vermont Cool 20K+ climate conversations with Vermonters 15K+

Vermonters taking climate action



0K+ new Vermonters to the climate movement

tabling events fairs, farmers markets, concerts, soccer games, etc.

5 Keep Vermont Cool Climate Action and Advocacy Workshops with...

Vermont climate

elected leaders

activists and



climate action webinars featuring a number of special guests – like climate leader Bill McKibben and Olympian Susan Dunklee - touching on a variety of climate related topics















































Big year for Ranked Choice Voting

Throughout our history, VPIRG has fought for and won many electoral reforms that have made Vermont the most accessible voting state in the nation. But there are still several ways we can improve our democracy – to make more of our voices heard and ensure that our elected officials better reflect the communities they serve.

We believe the best ideas should decide who wins, not the biggest bank account or outdated election rules that favor party bosses and special interests over voters. Voters want and deserve more choices at the ballot box. That's why VPIRG has worked to bring Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) to Vermont.

In 2022, VPIRG launched a major public education campaign to inform more Vermonters about the benefits of RCV and to build political support for the concept. The result was a success – as we were able to score major victories and create serious momentum for RCV in Vermont.

Ranked Choice Voting Primer

How it works:

With RCV, voters can choose just one candidate or rank the candidates in order of preference. If your favorite candidate can't win, your vote counts instantly for your second choice, so candidates must compete for every vote.

On the ballot, you can rank the candidates in order of preference: first, second, third, fourth, and so on. If one candidate receives a majority (more than 50%) of the first-choice votes, they win. If not, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and those votes count instantly towards the next choice on each voter's ballot. This process repeats until one candidate has a majority.

Why we need it:

Ranked choice voting would give Vermont voters more voice, more choice, and a stronger democracy by providing:

- Majority winners: To win, candidates need broad support, forcing them to reach beyond their base and appeal to more voters.
- More diversity: Studies have found RCV helps underrepresented groups such as women and candidates of color.
- More choices: RCV empowers voters to vote their favorite candidate, rather than picking the lesser of two evils.
- Less negative campaigning: Since candidates want to appeal to more voters as their first or second choice, they are less likely to smear their opponents.



Better Ballot Vermont Goes Live

2022 saw the launch of Better Ballot Vermont - a successful public education campaign on Ranked Choice Voting, spearheaded by VPIRG.

In February, then-State Senators Becca Balint, Chris Pearson and Kesha Ram-Hinsdale joined with the VPIRG democracy team and the nonprofit RepresentUs to create a TV ad highlighting the benefits of RCV: more voice, more choice, and a stronger democracy. The TV ad, which received significant airtime, signaled the launch of the Better Ballot Vermont website (betterballotvt. org) which showcases educational resources to help Vermonters better understand the benefits of RCV, answers frequently asked questions about the voting method, and provides the opportunity to take political action to bring RCV to Vermont.

Around the same time, Senator Ram-Hinsdale introduced legislation (S.229), cosponsored by then-Senators Balint & Pearson and others that would have brought RCV to federal races and the presidential primary and general election in 2024. That bill was eventually tabled but paved the way for legislation under consideration in the 2023 legislative session that would bring RCV to the presidential primaries in 2028.

Mock RCV Election Draws Serious Interest

To demonstrate just how easy and intuitive Ranked Choice Voting can be, VPIRG organized a virtual "mock" primary election ahead of the August primary for Vermont's U.S. House & Senate seats. For two weeks in June, Vermonters were able to vote in online RCV versions of either the



Republican or Democratic primaries with measures in place to prevent duplicate voting and preserve the integrity of the "mock" election. A dynamic graphic provided a real-time visualization of how exactly votes were distributed through the different rounds of voting.

Results were announced on June 21, and the clear winner was Ranked Choice Voting itself. Nearly 1,300 Vermonters participated and gave overwhelmingly positive feedback, with voters like Deb Moore of Rochester saying, "I have always thought that Ranked Choice Voting is the most democratic way to vote. I hope this becomes more standard in Vermont and everywhere!"

Legislative Approval of BTV Charter Change

The campaign to bring RCV to Vermont received another boost in May of 2022 when lawmakers approved Burlington's proposed Ranked Choice Voting charter change and the governor allowed it to become law without his signature. Burlington residents had, in 2021, overwhelmingly approved (with 64% of the vote) the change that put RCV in place for all future city council elections.

The legislative approval of the charter change meant that Burlington voters could start using RCV for the March 2023 Town Meeting Day elections, but as it turned out, some Burlingtonians would get to use RCV even sooner.

December 6th Special Election

The resignation of the East District city councilor triggered Burlington's first use of RCV since the 2021 charter change in December of last year. By all accounts, it was a huge success.

VPIRG organized an education campaign, working with voters, candidates, and local election officials to provide resources and advice ahead of the election. In collaboration with DemocracyRising, a national non-partisan non-profit, VPIRG ran a candidate training with all three candidates seeking the council seat. The training covered the basics of RCV, such as how voting works and understanding results, but also discussed campaign strategies to build a 50%+1 majority.

VPIRG also worked with the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center (RCVRC), another national non-partisan non-profit which helps jurisdictions implement RCV. Together, we helped the Burlington City Council navigate the necessary ordinances to run the RCV election. Additionally, RCVRC worked with the city to ensure they were prepared to count the votes on election night.

Leading up to the election, VPIRG phone banked and canvassed the East District to help voters prepare for the election and answer questions. Additionally, we interviewed voters about their experiences on election day and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Momentum for RCV builds

In many ways, 2022 was a watershed year for the campaign to bring Ranked Choice Voting to Vermont. Through VPIRG's outreach efforts, thousands of Vermonters were introduced to the concept and educated on its benefits. Voters in Vermont's most populous city used RCV to elect a city councilor to rave reviews. Meanwhile, hundreds of VPIRG members contacted their legislators in support of RCV legislation. All of this helped move Vermont closer than ever to implementing RCV for some elections statewide. For the latest updates on this campaign – visit BetterBallotVermont.org

Finally, an **Environmental Justice Law for** Vermont

VPIRG was part of a diverse coalition of organizations and individuals that successfully advocated for the enactment of the state's first environmental justice law in 2022.

The law (Act 154) improves the state's efforts to address environmental harms and lack of access to environmental benefits that disproportionately affect communities of color, low-income communities, and others.

VPIRG Climate & Equity Advocate Sebbi Wu speaks at a press conference at the State House where a diverse collection of environmental justice leaders came together to call for the passage of Vermont's first environmental justice law.



SPECIFICALLY, THE LAW:

- Requires the state of Vermont and all state agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their work, rules, and procedures.
- Establishes an environmental justice advisory council (that VPIRG worked to ensure is adequately funded) to advise on these issues.
- VPIRG's work on the legislation was led by Climate & Equity Advocate Sebbi Wu – who helped to coordinate the coalition behind the bill, testified in support of the legislation in committee, and organized VPIRG's outreach
- efforts to marshal grassroots action for the bill at key moments-including the days after legislative passage when there was some doubt as to whether or not Governor Scott would sign the bill.
- VPIRG organized a flood of calls and emails into the governor from our members and ultimately the governor did sign the bill into law.
- Celebrating the enactment of the law, Sebbi noted the time and contributions of so many environmental justice champions that made this achievement possible.

Enactment of the environmental justice law was one of the priorities of students who took part in the annual Youth Lobby Rally for the Planet on the State House lawn, pictured here.

- Encourages proactive environmental investments in chronically underserved communities.
- Requires the creation and maintenance of a mapping tool depicting environmental justice issues that can aid in state and local decision-making, public education, and engagement efforts.

"It is thanks to the tireless work of community leaders over several years that Vermont is embarking on this effort to bring a more comprehensive, inclusive approach to bringing health and justice to our communities. This law is a key step towards leaving no community behind in our efforts to address the climate crisis and other pressing environmental challenges."



50 **YEARS:**

VPIRG Marks a Half-Century Protecting the Public Interest



2022 was a banner year for VPIRG and not just because of the legislative victories we achieved or the successful campaigns we ran.

Last year, we celebrated our 50th anniversary – an incredible achievement made possible by the passionate, dedicated people who have staffed our organization and the generous, committed members who have supported us these many years.

VPIRG marked the occasion throughout the year by sharing thoughts and memories from VPIRGers past and presentreflections on the various campaigns we've run such as: Retiring Vermont Yankee as Planned, our 50 year quest to defend and modernize Vermont's Bottle Bill, our successful GMO labeling campaign, countless efforts to address the climate crisis, and so much more.

The year-long commemoration culminated in September as the VPIRG team gathered at the University of Vermont campus with members, supporters, allies, students, trustees, and former staff for a wonderful night of celebration.

Fifty years is a long time and over those years we've had literally thousands of people connected to VPIRG in one way or another. It was wonderful to see such a multigenerational room come together to honor our past, raise a glass to our achievements, and brainstorm what the next 50 years should look like.













Attendees heard from VPIRG Executive Director Paul Burns, Board President Anna Seuberling and special guests Senator Bernie Sanders and Congressman Peter Welch. Both spoke of their own long relationship with VPIRG and the impact that the organization has had on Vermont.

"VPIRG happens to be one of my very, very favorite organizations in the world," Sen. Sanders said. "You have been a leader in this state, a leader in this country and I thank you very much for that."

"The work VPIRG has done-whether it was on Vermont Yankee, or toxic chemicals, or our democracy ... engaging with people so that they can see what it is that is happening and then be empowered to change it—you've been doing that for 50 years," Rep. Welch added. "That's the hard work that makes me so respect VPIRG."

Climate scientist and best-selling author Katharine Hayhoe delivered an interactive keynote address that was both sobering and inspiring. Her message has largely informed the work of our Keep Vermont Cool campaign, and her talk integrated local data gathered by VPIRG to illustrate how Vermonters feel about the climate crisis and how we can empower one another to act.

Following the speeches, attendees gathered for a tented reception to eat, drink, dance, and hear toasts and remembrances.

Everyone felt a shared sense of appreciation for the vision, grit, and determination of the public interest champions who came before and excitement for the campaigns that lie ahead.









"VPIRG happens to be one of my very, very favorite organizations in the world"

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

Year in Review

JANUARY

VPIRG Joins 33 Groups in Supporting Environmental Justice Legislation

VPIRG organized 32 other groups — including organizations working to end poverty, promote racial and social justice, protect our environment, and make our communities more vibrant — to submit a letter to members of the Vermont State Senate supporting S.148 – the state's first comprehensive environmental justice policy. That bill would go on to become law. Read the full story on page 10 to learn how it passed and what it will do.

FEBRUARY



Vermont Public Utilities Commission Rejects Global Foundries Request for Special Treatment

In 2021, Global Foundries petitioned Vermont to become a "self-managed" utility exempt from the state's renewable energy and energy efficiency requirements. VPIRG and our allies organized the public against this and in February 2022 the PUC formally rejected the request. Following that decision, Global Foundries announced its intention to move forward as a selfmanaged utility, albeit one that is required to adhere to all of Vermont's clean energy and emissions reduction requirements.

MARCH

Keep Vermont Cool Campaign Goes Live

At a virtual press conference, VPIRG announced the launch of Keep Vermont Cool—a new campaign designed to connect with and activate the thousands of Vermonters we know are alarmed about climate change but are not currently engaging in the political process. The campaign would ultimately succeed in getting more than 15,000 Vermonters to take climate action in 2022—10,000 of whom were new to the climate movement. Read the full story about the Keep Vermont Cool campaign on page 4.

APRIL

Ranked Choice Voting for Burlington Heads to the Governor's Desk

The Vermont Senate gave final approval to H.744, allowing Vermont's largest city to implement Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) for city council elections moving forward. Burlington residents had previously voted overwhelmingly in support of the electoral reform. VPIRG campaigned for that vote as part of our broader efforts to bring RCV to Vermont. Governor Scott would eventually let H.744 become law without his signature, paving the way for Burlington to use RCV for a special City Council election in December 2022.

MAY

Vermont Legislature Votes to Phase Out Most Toxic Lightbulbs

Vermont became the first state in the nation to ban the sale of most mercury-containing fluorescent light bulbs in May. VPIRG led the effort to pass H.500, which will prohibit the sale of 4-foot linear fluorescent light bulbs starting January 1, 2024. Together with a regulatory change adopted earlier by the Agency of Natural Resources phasing out screw-in mercury-containing compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), more than 90% of mercury lighting sales will end by 2024. This is good news for consumers and the environment as these fluorescent lights are not only toxic, but they are also more costly than readily available LED alternatives that last much longer and use only a fraction of the energy.

JUNE

VPIRG Hosts Series of Candidate Forums Ahead of Historic Election

With Vermont preparing for an election with more open seats for federal and statewide office than any other time in recent history, VPIRG convened a series of



Wednesday, May 25th 6-7:30 PM

debates ahead of the August primary election to help voters learn where candidates stood on critical public interest issues. VPIRG held virtual forums featuring candidates for U.S. Congress, lieutenant governor, secretary of state and attorney general.

JULY

Climate Coalition Provides Vermonters with a "Deep Dive" on Vermont's Climate Investments

VPIRG joined with allies from several organizations to host a series of summer webinars breaking down what the historic climate investments in the FY 2023 Vermont budget would mean for Vermonters. Just a month earlier, Vermont enacted a state budget and annual transportation funding legislation that included: \$80 million for weatherization, \$25 million for heating and transportation electrification for low- and moderateincome Vermonters, \$45 million in efficiency and clean heating options for municipal buildings, \$40 million for electric vehicles, EV charging infrastructure, public transit and micro-transit.

AUGUST



Successful Summer Door-to-Door Canvass Comes to a Close

2022 marked VPIRG's return to a fully in-person summer door-to-door canvass. Our intrepid canvass team knocked on over 60,000 doors in every corner of the state to build support for our Keep Vermont Cool campaign. By August, the canvass team had renewed thousands of VPIRG members and got more than 15,000 Vermonters to take our "climate voter pledge."

SEPTEMBER

VPIRG Celebrates 50th Anniversary

The VPIRG team came together at the place where our organization got its start in 1972—the University of Vermont campus—to toast 50 years protecting the public interest in Vermont. Staff members (past and present) joined VPIRG members, supporters, allies, and trustees for an inspiring night of celebration. Read the full story on page 11.

OCTOBER



VPIRG Calls on REI to Stop Selling Outdoor Gear Containing PFAS

REI members and advocates in more than 20 cities rallied and delivered petitions signed by more than 130,000 people to REI stores nationwide, demanding the company ban PFAS in the products it sells. In Vermont, VPIRG advocates staged an event

at the local REI store in Williston to deliver a letter to the store manager, urging REI executives to live up to their stated commitment to sustainability and remove PFAS from their products. NOTE: In 2023, REI announced it would ban PFAS "forever chemicals" (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in all textile products and cookware from its suppliers.

NOVEMBER

Keep Vermont Cool Kicks Off Climate Action and Advocacy Tour

After mobilizing over 15,000 Vermonters to take climate action over the summer, the Keep Vermont Cool campaign team sought to build on that momentum by touring the state and providing Vermonters with the opportunity to connect with their elected leaders and make the case for bold climate action in the 2023 legislative session. Keep Vermont Cool hosted 15 Climate Action & Advocacy workshops across the state – connecting hundreds of Vermonters with 40+ legislators at these interactive events.

DECEMBER

Vermont Adopts Rules for Cleaner Cars and Trucks

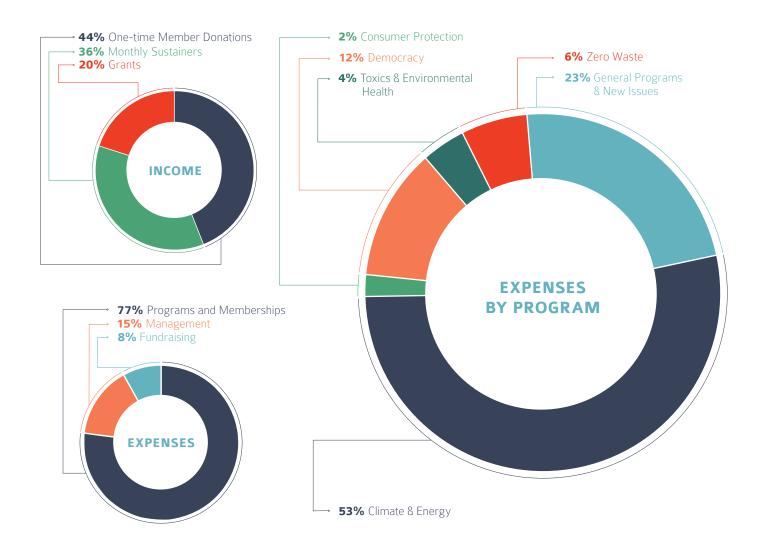
Vermont moved forward with two key regulations to address pollution from transportation in the state: the Advanced Clean Cars (ACC) II program and the Advanced Clean Trucks (ACT) regulation. VPIRG had advocated for the adoption of these rules. Beginning in 2025, the ACT rule will require manufacturers to produce and sell an increasing percentage of zeroemission trucks and buses annually through 2035. The ACC II program promotes the electrification of light-duty cars and would require automakers to offer a gradually increasing percentage of zero-emission vehicles within the Vermont market, eventually putting the state's car and light truck sales on a pathway toward 100 percent electric vehicle (EV) sales by 2035.

Powered by You: Our 2022 Finances by the Numbers

In 2022, 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 \$2,134,752 of which more than \$1,703,861 came from individual member donations, 45% of that coming from our monthly sustaining members. Combined expenses totaled \$2,367,059. Program expenses and member services account for 77% of our expenses.

	VPIRG	VPIREF	TOTAL
Income	\$1,473,044	\$661,708	\$2,134,752
Expenses	\$1,772,077	\$594,983	\$2,367,059



BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Lindsey Lefevre (they/them)

Since its inception, VPIRG has relied on student activists to help guide its mission and advocacy. That proud tradition has continued with the appointment of our latest student Board of Trustees member Lindsey Lefevre.

Lindsey moved to Vermont from North Carolina in 2020 to attend the University of Vermont. Originally interested in physical therapy, they found that being on a college campus at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning of the BLM movement kindled an interest in the intersectionality of public health for them.

Lindsey joined VPIRG in the summer of 2022 as a member of the Keep Vermont Cool street team, running tables at events across the state to talk to Vermonters about the broad impacts and intersectionality of the climate crisis.

After the KVC summer campaign wrapped up and Lindsey went back to class, they took it upon themself to revive the VPIRG club at UVM, just in time for VPIRG's 50th anniversary. VPIRG got its start in the halls of UVM, and according to Lindsey, "I thought that bringing the KVC campaign to UVM would be successful and a great opportunity for students. So I just did it."

As president of the VPIRG at UVM club, Lindsey led the charge on voter registration drives and outreach in the run-up to the 2022 election, along with drumming up student support for the Keep Vermont Cool campaign.

VPIRG has a history of students serving as trustees, and Lindsey was nominated to the Board in the fall of 2022. Lindsey is the type of person to say yes to any opportunity, and was eager to get more involved with VPIRG, so the position was a natural fit.

"It was really exciting for me to be able to see what happens in the background to keep a nonprofit alive. With VPIRG, it made me feel very confident in the organization because they really held true to their mission and to who they are as an organization... I just thought it was cool that they wanted a student's perspective with some of these bigger decisions being made."

Lindsey strongly believes that young voices need a seat at the decision-making table, especially since "the legislative decisions that are being made today are impacting us the most, and they're going to impact our kids and our families in the future."

Lindsey brings important perspectives to VPIRG's board beyond their status as a student.

"I am a queer person, I'm non-binary, I'm trans and all of those identities and my experiences shape the way that I think and look at things."

Having minority voices at the table when crafting policy is crucial to making sure policy works in the public interest, and their identity informs how they view VPIRG's public policy work too.

"[My identity] helps me say, okay, how will this affect most people? How will this affect queer people? Or then take it a step further with intersectionality - you can't just stop with how this will affect me. Let's look at race, let's look at gender, let's look at socioeconomic status and see what would happen in different situations and with different identities and how would that affect different people differently."

Lindsey will be graduating in December of 2023, and while they don't know exactly what their post-grad plans are, their work with VPIRG will surely have an impact on where they go next.

"I want to keep working with nonprofits and really have a better understanding of how important policy is to health. Moving forward, that's definitely something I'm going to look at and consider regardless of what direction I end up going."



Supporters

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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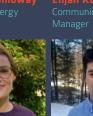




















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