

## **DRAFT Vermont Climate Council Just Transitions Subcommittee Letter of Solidarity with VT Renews BIPOC Council**

Date: [insert date here]

**TO:**

Vermont Climate Council  
Secretary of Administration, Chair, Vermont Climate Council, Kristin Clouser

**CC:**

VT Renews BIPOC Advisory Council  
Rights & Democracy  
Vermont State Labor Council, AFL-CIO  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont  
350VT

**Subject:** Request to the Vermont Climate Council for a public response to the VT Renews BIPOC Council letters dated April, 2021 and September, 2022

The Just Transitions Subcommittee (JT) of the Vermont Climate Council (VCC) is writing to voice our solidarity with the VT Renews BIPOC Council and to request the Vermont Climate Council make a public written response to the letters from the VT Renews BIPOC council and addressed to the VCC Chair and other public officials.

Several opportunities to take reparational steps have been laid out for the VCC by the VT Renews BIPOC Council in two letters – one from April 2021 and another from September 2022. While the VCC has discussed the content of the letters, it has not offered a formal response to date. We believe that a response must be made and that engaging with the writers of these letters will help to build mutual trust - crucial to our collective success.

The Just Transitions Subcommittee would like to express gratitude and respect to the individuals and groups who crafted these letters. We also acknowledge that this kind of community engagement is essential for real change in Vermont. BIPOC organizers are sharing their concerns and providing labor and expertise, despite long being marginalized or ignored. This is the time for historically empowered groups to take a step back and listen.

We write this letter with the hopes of accomplishing three things:

**(1) to request that the Vermont Climate Council responds publicly to the two letters from the VT Renews BIPOC Council and offer an apology for not responding formally in a timely fashion,**

**(2) to acknowledge that the Just Transitions Subcommittee has more work to do to be truly inclusive and welcoming to all Vermonters, and**

**(3) to encourage other Vermont Climate Councilors and Subcommittee Members to reflect on ways in which we are falling short in our support of BIPOC Vermonters in our work and what we can do – individually and collectively – to uplift and honor these voices.**

We recognize that the Vermont Climate Council has not to date made a formal public response to any public comments, and we find this lack of response both dismissive and silencing. Considering, in particular, the many months that passed between the September 2022 letter and Councilors being made aware of it, the lack of a public response is just one more drop in an overflowing bucket of actions that have led historically marginalized communities to feel neglected, sidelined, excluded, and marginalized by government bodies. These are the exact voices we have all committed to be listening to and prioritizing.

These requests, offered in the spirit of cooperation, have created an opportunity for the VCC to start making different choices that will more effectively engage a wider and more diverse group of Vermonters in the Council's work.

We are aware that some actions outlined in the VT Renews letters are within the Council's purview, and many are not. For instance, the composition of the Council is determined by the legislature. However, the Council, for example, can request that the legislature include a more diverse representation of Vermonters when they make decisions about who to appoint to the Council. We understand that this could be particularly impactful as Senate appointments are due to expire this coming Fall.

We understand the concerns raised in these letters may not be resolved easily and may lead to complex policy discussions – *and* at the same time, responding to the requests in these letters is essential if we are to engage in effective conversation with these organizations and the communities they represent. Building trust requires a two-way communication where we can express our commitments and limitations honestly. And for this reason, we must provide respectful spaces for concerns to be honestly shared with us. Policies and process are too often simply tools used to exclude certain voices or as an excuse to turn away.

We hope that the VT Renews BIPOC Council will engage with the Just Transitions Subcommittee, the Climate Council, and the Climate Action Office - recognizing that office is responsible for implementation of the Climate Action Plan - on how to further support authentic, influential engagement with Vermonters who are being excluded from this work, whether that exclusion is through process, policy, oversight, or intentional avoidance. We have invited the letter signers to meet with the Just Transitions Subcommittee and offered space for further discussion.

We do not have all the solutions – but we want to start by listening to those who have long been sidelined or silenced. We cannot change past actions, but we can continue to do better going forward, and we ask the VCC to do the same and to start by publicly responding to these letters.