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Testimony to the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report

October 29, 2021

Public Hearing

I will admit that I am not as prepared for this testimony as I would like, having been working as hard as possible lately in my role as the Farm & Forest sector representative to the Vermont Climate Council.

Believe it or not I do find there are parallels between your work here and the work being done within the climate council as we attempt to grapple with the complexities of moving our society forward into an equitable, resilient and just future in the face of a changing climate.

The very same schools, districts, communities, and pupils impacted by our inequitable and unjust formula also tend to overlap with the frontline and impacted communities as defined by the Guiding Principles created by the Just Transitions subcommittee of the climate council.

As a bit of background, I am a 6th generation dairy farmer living and stewarding land in Whitingham, VT, unceded Abenaki homeland. I graduated from Whitingham's (at that time K-12 school) which has now been combined with Wilmington to create the Twin Valley schools where my children, ages 11 and 7 now attend.

I mentioned ties to climate earlier and I'm wanting to draw that connection better. Simply put, the difference in greenhouse house emissions from my childhood experience of attending a school within 2 miles of my home to transporting our children across multiple towns as so many now do adds up In our vehicle miles traveled. As any parent well knows if you have an involved child you are at the school potentially multiple times a day. That has a direct impact to our transportation sector emissions which accounts for the bulk of VT's emissions profile.

Community resilience will be utterly critical in the face of a changing climate as well. The combination of far flung schools with dual parent working households is not a recipe for sustainable and resilient communities or children. It cannot be that the schools that overlap serving our frontline and impacted communities can be the least resourced. It cannot be that the people who bear the disproportionate impacts of climate change are the same who face inequitable education for their children and high property taxes.

Our farm is a certified organic dairy shipping high quality milk to Organic Valley. We have been rotationally and regeneratively grazing animals since the 1960s, we consistently produce high quality milk from our thriving and biodiverse perennial pastures, our farm is fully conserved and solar powered. We are farming here in ways that are both adaptive and resilient to climate change in addition to sequestering carbon in our healthy soils. It cannot be that in Vermont of all places, where we claim to treasure our natural and working lands, and In a moment when we so need them to sustain our shared future, that I have to choose between my farm and my children's educational opportunities. I cannot move this farm and I cannot make a living farming to afford me the privilege of shuttling them elsewhere.

How can it be that in a state like Vermont,, that claims the reputation it does, that a zip code

determines the quality of education a child receives? It is untenable. We need our communities of color, our farm worker communities, our low income and rural communities to have equitable access to educational opportunity. We need the community resilience that a strong school system provides. Schools are anchor points in a community and the communities that have faced the decimation of opportunity because of inequitable funding are living through what essentially amounts to the VT version of “nice white parents.”

I am imploring you, from the very bottom of my heart, to please fix the formula of the pupil weighting system so that funds can be accessed equitably throughout our state.

We all benefit from strong and resilient communities whether they exist in urban downtowns like Winooski or a rural town like Whitingham. We must fix our formula and establish an equitable education system so that all of Vermont’s children can thrive and be educated with dignity.