



Voices
for Vermont's Children

2022 GENERAL ELECTION

ALL-IN FOR KIDS VOTER GUIDE



The complex challenges facing families, children and youth demand thoughtful, comprehensive solutions. This guide will help voters identify where candidates stand on the issues that matter most to kids and families.

VOTING IN VERMONT



Vermont takes voting seriously, and has worked to remove barriers to participation. You can register online, at your town clerk's office, or at the DMV. If you've moved recently, or are unsure about your registration status, you can check your status easily (and register if necessary) at mvp.vermont.gov. You can register if you will be 18 on or before election day. This year every registered voter will be mailed a general election ballot. Vermonters can choose to vote in person on election day, November 8th, or return their ballot by mail or at a ballot drop box in advance.

Once you receive your ballot, voting it is as easy as Sign, Seal & Send!

- **Sign:** Place your voted ballot in the ballot envelope and sign the certificate on the outside of the envelope, following all instructions included with your ballot.
- **Seal:** Seal your signed ballot envelope, with your voted ballot inside. Place and seal your ballot envelope inside the mailing envelope.
- **Send:** Return your ballot to your Town or City Clerk. They must have your ballot in hand by 7pm on Election Day (Tuesday, November 8) for it to be counted!

How you return your ballot is up to you. You may return your ballot:

- **By mail:** We recommend mailing your ballot package no later than Monday, October 31st to ensure adequate time for it to be delivered to your Town or City Clerk.
- **In person:** Bring your ballot to your Town or City Clerk's office during normal business hours.
- **Drop off** at a secure ballot drop box before Election Day: Check the "Voters" page of our website, under "Quick Links," or check with your Town or City Clerk's office to see if a secure ballot drop box is available.
- **Bring your ballot to the polls** on Election Day: Bring your ballot to your polling location on Election Day (November 8, 2022) before the polls close at 7pm.

All polls will be open as usual on Election Day on Tuesday, November 8, 2022. Check <https://mvp.vermont.gov> or directly with your Town or City Clerk to find out where your polling place is, check your registration status or check your voter mailing address.

To check on the status of your ballot, please use our online ballot tracking service at mvp.vermont.gov or contact your town clerk.

Voices for Vermont's Children is an is a non-partisan 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization. This guide is intended to educate voters and help them understand candidates' positions on issues impacting children, youth and families. No endorsement is implied or given to any candidate or party.

CHILDREN & YOUTH: OUR FUTURE AND OUR PRESENT

Often conversations about child and family policy focus on children's future value – as members of the workforce, or as leaders solving the social and environmental crises they've inherited. But in most of the world children are recognized as having intrinsic value, and the protection and care of children is understood to be a shared public responsibility. In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) brought together world leaders to recognize that childhood is “a special, protected time, in which children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity.” Nearly 200 countries signed onto the declaration; the United States did not.

This is more than a symbolic omission. Our disregard for children is apparent in measures of child and family well-being. Among nations with similar economic and governmental structures, the US routinely reports among the highest rates of poverty, income inequality, and infant mortality. Outcomes for Black, Brown and Indigenous children are substantially worse, stemming from centuries of economic, legal and social exploitation. Our children are

growing up in a pervasive, damaging climate of racial, environmental, economic and gender-based violence – as well as increasing gun violence. At the national level in particular, elected leaders seem unable to advance substantive policy change.

Vermont does relatively better on these measures, but in absolute terms there is so much that remains to be done. As a small state with growing racial and ethnic diversity, the impacts of white supremacy are still sometimes obscured in our statewide data. But make no mistake, Black, Brown and Indigenous residents are living with these cumulative disparities every day, and our individual and collective well-being suffers for it.

Vermont has enacted policies that are more child and family friendly than other parts of the country. This foundation positions us well to take additional steps to ensure, once and for all, that children and families have what they need to achieve economic security.

Now is the time to push the needs of the over 120,000 children and youth who call Vermont home—but currently lack a vote—to the forefront of every candidate's agenda.



NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY

The winners of the upcoming elections will be in a unique position to make public policies that impact the immediate and future well-being of Vermont's children and families, and the ability of our communities to thrive. This is not a comprehensive list of every issue impacting kids and youth. We're focusing on our two priority campaigns, End Child Poverty, and Child & Youth Safety, which encompass a number of connected policies, as well as Education Equity.

Understanding how candidates make policy decisions is perhaps even more important than knowing where they stand on a particular issue. We can't predict every policy question that will come before elected officials, and each policy contains nuances that can't possibly be explored comprehensively on the campaign trail. So to begin, this guide poses some questions that will help voters understand candidates' decision-making frameworks. What are their values? To whom do they feel most accountable? Do they understand and support equity?

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Q: Vermont statutes state the budget should "reflect the public policy goals established in State law and recognize every person's need for health, housing, dignified work, education, food, social security, and a healthy environment." Vermont has a strong foundation of programs and policies that benefit kids and families, but many gaps remain. From housing and food insecurity, to under-resourced mental health and early care and learning systems, too many kids and families are still struggling. How would you go about directing adequate public funding to ensure that these gaps are filled?

Q: When it comes to policy-making, details matter. A policy that sounds good in theory can contain modifiers or exceptions that limit its effectiveness or even create unintended negative consequences. What steps would you take to understand a complex policy prior to taking a position? What sources would you consult, or from whom would you seek input?

Q: What does the concept of "equity" mean to you, and what role do you think it should play in policy making?

A FOUNDATION OF WELLNESS: FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY

Income inequality has been growing for decades - destabilizing families, communities, and the economy as a whole, and forcing too many children to live out their most critical developmental years in poverty. Poverty and related adverse conditions negatively impact child health and wellbeing, and are the root cause of inequities throughout the lifespan. Poverty and racial inequities are inextricably linked and maintained by existing systems, with children of color experiencing poverty and near poverty at nearly twice the rate of white children. Vermont must address the structural inequities in our system if we want to eliminate poverty and its destructive effects.

What we mean when we say “poverty.” The Supplemental Poverty Measure or SPM is a more comprehensive measure than the original federal poverty guideline. Unlike the federal poverty guideline which is based on an outdated food budget, SPM includes expenses related to employment, like transportation and childcare; and counts government benefits and tax credits for a more complete picture of financial sufficiency. In many states and nationally, the SPM rate is lower than the standard poverty measure. But Vermont’s SPM is the same as our official poverty measure, meaning that our social supports barely offset the higher costs of living but don’t help families get ahead.



- Thousands of Vermont’s children live in families below 100% of the federal poverty level and when children in low-income families just above poverty are included, nearly one-in-three Vermont kids are growing up without sufficient resources to meet basic needs.
- Poverty and child welfare are linked, with children living in lower income families at higher risk of experiencing childhood traumas, which are correlated with health and socio-economic problems as adults;
- Poverty contributes to negative outcomes for children, including disparities in school-readiness and continued lags in learning.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Q. Even when Vermont's safety net programs are combined, they do not meet the basic needs of children in families struggling to access financial security. Would you support increasing benefits in programs like Reach Up to a level that would effectively bring our supplemental poverty rate to zero?

Q. Due to historical legal and policy exclusions like housing discrimination, exclusionary discipline in schools, and pay gaps, Black, Brown and Indigenous people living in Vermont continue to face barriers. What would you do to close those gaps and help ensure every Vermont child can fulfill their potential?

Q. On top of extensive research from around the globe, the pandemic has demonstrated the need for a universal, equitable paid family and medical leave program. The United States is one of only a handful of countries in the world that do not offer any form of paid family leave, and the only wealthy nation to leave parents and caregivers high and dry. Given the lack of federal action on paid leave, what do you think Vermont should be doing to support parents and caregivers in our paid workforce?

Q. The first states that implemented paid leave programs found that low wage replacement levels made the program less viable for the very workers least likely to have access to other forms of paid leave. Do you have thoughts about key features of a paid leave program that assure equitable access?



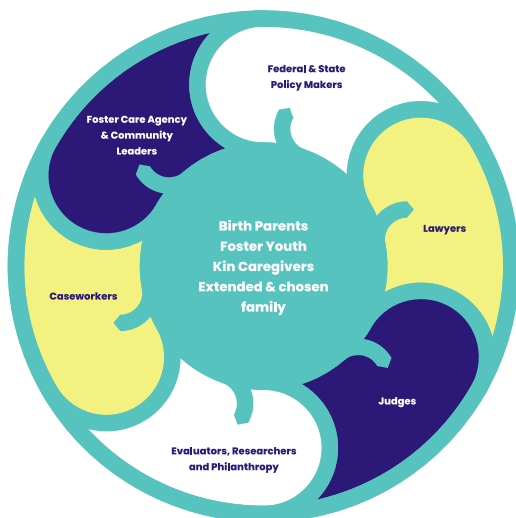
CHILD & YOUTH SAFETY

Foster care involvement is linked to some of society's biggest problems:

- 86% of US child trafficking survivors experienced foster care
- 60% of young people arrested have had foster care involvement
- 47% of older youth in foster care do not graduate high school on time and 97% of older foster youth do not graduate college
- 51% of young people without housing have experienced foster care

Child and youth wellbeing is linked to the strength of families and communities. Expecting under-resourced families operating within inequitable systems to flourish is magical thinking. Families need equitable access to safe and affordable housing, family support services, healthcare, and nutritious food. Child well-being is undermined by trauma and violence. Children today are growing up in an unceasing climate of gun violence, racial violence, gender violence, economic violence, and environmental violence. If we are to truly move toward justice as a community, we must be prepared for the deep engagement, vulnerability, and relational work this moment requires, and not fall back on retributive and reactionary responses.

Vermont must improve transitional support to young adults, especially those launching into adulthood with the deck stacked against them: former foster youth, BIPOC, LGBTQI+, and those raised in economically disadvantaged families.



The Center for Lived Experience, a project of Think of Us, envisions an equitable foster care ecosystem that centers impacted people. Learn more at www.thinkof-us.org/about/center-for-lived-experience

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Q. Outcomes for people who have experienced foster care are terrible: they are much more likely to be victims of trafficking, to be unhoused, to be arrested, and to experience PTSD. It's clear that our foster care system, as currently structured, is not breaking cycles of violence and trauma as intended. In order to create new outcomes we need to invest in children, youth, and families differently. **What policies would you champion to improve family stability and child safety?**

Q. Prior to the pandemic, the poverty rate among young adults (18-24) climbed to 24%. Estimates from 2021 show this falling slightly to 23%, likely as a result of COVID-19 relief programs including expanded access to the Earned Income Tax Credit for young adults without children. That policy has ended at the federal level. **What steps do you think Vermont should take to support the economic security of youth transitioning to adulthood?**



EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Access to a safe, inclusive and equitable public education is a fundamental right of all our children and youth. Educating our young people stands as one of our society's most significant responsibilities and requires a public school system that is well-resourced and responsive to the needs of its students and communities.

Our schools should be places where every student thrives, where all young people, regardless of income, where they live, their race or background get the education they need to support a life with dignity, hope and meaning. Unfortunately, the growing disparities and inequities we see in our larger communities also impact our education system. Striking inequity across race, class, and (dis)ability in our schools mirror these larger trends. Kids with economic stability and racial privilege tend to do better in school while students from low-income families, students of color, and students with disabilities score worse on standardized tests, are more likely to be suspended or expelled, and are less likely to graduate on time. Our schools cannot address the problems of racism, poverty and inequitable education outcomes alone. But, with our educational, health, and human services systems working together, we can transform our institutions to better serve children, youth and families.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES



Q. In Vermont, the decades-long effort to center equity in our state's education system has generated numerous reforms focused on policy, practice, and education funding. Not unlike other complex systems like human services and health care, education policies are often under-resourced, lack stakeholder input, and are implemented piecemeal. Yet collectively, they could be the foundation for significant change. Do you consider public education a priority? Why?

Q. How do you think existing education policies address education inequity? What else is needed?

Q. What is the function of a public education system?

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

General

Q. Vermont statutes state the budget should “reflect the public policy goals established in State law and recognize every person's need for health, housing, dignified work, education, food, social security, and a healthy environment.” Vermont has a strong foundation of programs and policies that benefit kids and families, but many gaps remain. From housing and food insecurity, to an inadequate mental health system, too many kids are still struggling. How would you go about directing adequate public funding to ensure that these gaps are filled?

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Econ Security

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Safety

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Education

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