



**Rev Mark Hughes,
Vermont Racial Justice Alliance**

Testimony for the Budget Adjustment Act Public Hearing

Vermont State Budget Adjustment Testimony Committee

Vermont House Appropri

January 14, 2025, 1:15 PM

Good afternoon. My name is Rev Mark Hughes and I am here to **speak in support of protecting Vermont's civil rights infrastructure** in the face of the federal infrastructure being decommissioned, gutted or politically repurposed.

Over the past year, the federal government has sharply reduced civil rights enforcement across housing, employment, education, environmental justice, and public safety. In Vermont, this has real and measurable economic consequences.

Based on state budget documents and agency data, Vermont is already losing approximately \$170,000 annually in direct federal civil rights enforcement funding. More significantly, the Vermont Human Rights Commission has documented the need for nearly \$900,000 per year in additional state funding simply to maintain basic enforcement capacity as federal agencies retreat and case volume shifts to the state.

Beyond enforcement, Vermont faces a broader shock. Federal pauses and cancellations affecting education, housing stability, public health, transportation, and environmental justice total approximately \$40 million or more in a single year. These losses increase discrimination risk, destabilize housing and employment, and ultimately drive higher downstream costs in healthcare, homelessness services, litigation, and lost productivity.

In short, federal civil rights retrenchment is not cost-neutral. It transfers risk and expense directly onto Vermont communities and the state budget. Strategic state investment now is fiscally prudent, constitutionally necessary, and far less costly than unmanaged harm later.

Vermont has an opportunity—through the Budget Adjustment Act—to stabilize its civil rights enforcement capacity, protect Equal Protection, and prevent preventable economic damage.

Finally, I want to express strong support for the Governor's recommended budget readjustment for the Land Access Opportunity Board. Expanding equitable access to land directly addresses structural barriers rooted in discrimination, strengthens food security, and builds long-term economic resilience. This is exactly the kind of forward-looking, justice-centered investment Vermont needs at this moment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Rev Mark Hughes
Executive Director,
Vermont Racial Justice Alliance