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**November 27, 2012**

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## **YOUTH CLIMATE CASE NOW IN THE HANDS OF THE WASHINGTON SUPREME COURT**

*Youth, Leading Climate Scientist, Faith-Based Groups and Scholars Ask Washington's State Supreme Court to Uphold the State Constitution and the Public Trust Doctrine and Protect Essential Resources for All Washingtonians*

Seattle, Washington – Yesterday, seven young petitioners and their guardians filed their final [brief](#) before the Washington Supreme Court asking it to reverse a lower court's dismissal of their case to protect public trust resources of the state. The appeal was filed after a judge in King County Superior Court dismissed their climate change [lawsuit](#) brought against Governor Gregoire, the Director of the Department of Ecology, the Commissioner of Public Lands, and the Director of the Department of Fish & Wildlife. The lawsuit seeks to force Washington to reduce carbon dioxide emissions at levels needed to avert the climate crisis.

The fate of the youths' lawsuit is now before the Washington Supreme Court. Already, in response to a lawsuit by Texas youth, a court has ruled that the atmosphere is a public trust resource in that state. The Washington case is one of a series of coordinated legal actions across the country to compel government action on climate change. One law firm in Houston has called the unprecedented decision in Texas, "a 'shot heard 'round the world' in climate change litigation."

The youths' drive for bringing the lawsuit comes from their interest in protecting the environment and the alarming research of our nation's top scientists. According to leading climate scientist, Dr. James Hansen, "the science is crystal clear—we must rapidly reduce fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissions if we are to have a chance of protecting Earth's natural systems for these young people." Hansen submitted a [declaration](#) supporting the youths' appeal to the Washington Supreme Court in which he states:

*"Further delay of meaningful action to address climate change vastly increases the risk of irretrievable damage to the climate system. Delaying action to return the atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration to approximately 350 ppm by the end of the century may doom the prospect of stabilizing the Earth's climate system and mitigating human suffering."*

Along with Dr. Hansen’s declaration, two *amicus curiae* briefs were filed in support of the Washington youth. Several faith-based groups submitted an [amicus brief](#) arguing that the inequities of climate change threaten human rights and that international human rights law is applicable in this Atmospheric Trust Litigation (ATL) case. In their brief the groups, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church Faith Action Network, the Pacific Northwest Conference of Christ, The Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Right Reverend Gregory Rickel, VIII Bishop of Olympia, the Episcopal Church in western Washington, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace and Washington Unitarian Universalist Voices for Justice, draw the Court’s attention to “the important link between climate induced rights impacts and the diverse calls of faith-based communities for moral action on climate change.” Another brief was filed by the Western Environmental Law Center on behalf of over 20 legal scholars from around the country, who argue that the Public Trust Doctrine extends to the atmosphere.

“The brave youth who have filed this case against the State deserve to have their day in court,” said Andrea Rodgers, attorney for the youth. “Even though the State has publically recognized the need to address climate change, it has failed to assert leadership and take action that is scientifically and legally necessary to protect the critical natural resources in this State from harm due to climate change. Sadly, it is the youth petitioners and the future generations of this State who will suffer most from the State’s abdication of its sovereign responsibility. The Washington Supreme Court now has the opportunity to review the youth petitioners’ case and declare that their right to use, access and enjoy the natural resources of this State is a right protected by law.”

***Our Children's Trust** is a nonprofit focused on protecting earth’s natural systems for current and future generations. We are supporting youth in the coordinated Atmospheric Trust Litigation effort. We are here to empower youth as they stand up for their lawful inheritance: a healthy planet. We are mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers. We are adults, part of the ruling generation, and we care about the future of our children—and their children’s children. [www.ourchildrenstrust.org/](http://www.ourchildrenstrust.org/)*

***iMatter** is a youth-led campaign of the nonprofit group, Kids vs Global Warming, that is focused on mobilizing and empowering youth to lead the way to a sustainable and just world. Using multiple platforms at the local, state, and national level, we are committed to raising the voices of the youngest generation to issue a wake-up call to live, lead and govern as if our future matters. [www.imattermarch.org/](http://www.imattermarch.org/)*

***WITNESS** is the global pioneer in the use of video to promote human rights. We empower people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change. In partnership with the iMatter TRUST Campaign we seek to bring visibility to the challenges our youth already face because of the changing climate and call for a massive assault on fossil fuel emissions. Without an all-out assault, effects will range from drought to disease; from food shortages to tainted water supplies; from the loss of homes due to floods, erosion and fire to massive relocations. The human rights challenge is most succinctly summarized by Mary Robinson, “Climate change will, in short, have immense human consequences.” WITNESS partnered on this campaign in hopes that predictions will not become realities.*

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