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STATE OF ALASKA DENIES YOUTH THE RIGHT TO A SAFE CLIMATE

Anchorage - Yesterday, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) denied a climate change rulemaking petition brought by 15 youth petitioners from across the state. The petition called on the ADEC to reduce CO₂ emissions according to the best available climate science, inventory substantial sources of GHG emissions, and adopt a Climate Action Plan.

In ADEC’s denial of the petition, among other reasons, agency commissioner Larry Hartig stated:

“The extent of emission reductions proposed in the petition would have significant consequences for employment, resource development, power generation, health, culture, and other economic and social interests within the state.”

Nathan Baring, 17-year-old petitioner from Fairbanks and one of 21 youth plaintiffs on the national climate case Juliana v. United States said:

“While I sympathize with the ADEC on protecting our fiscal future, I will not stand for an energy system that places profits over people and our collective responsibility to protect our wonderful state for future generations of Alaskans to enjoy. Our constitutional rights are at stake and we have given the ADEC the opportunity to forge a new economic
path forward that is based on equity and sustainability. Unfortunately, we will now have to consider whether to use legal action to protect these rights.”

With support from Our Children’s Trust, Youth Organizers with Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA) joined youth petitioners who called on the State of Alaska to adhere to its legal and moral obligation to protect current and future generations from the deepening impact of Alaska’s changing climate.

**Brian Conwell**, AYEA youth organizer of Unalaska said:

“Climate change is a moral issue, and our leaders have a moral obligation to deal with it.”

Alaskans are already responding to devastating impacts of rapid climate change, including infrastructure damage due to thawing permafrost; loss of and reduced access to subsistence resources due to warming ocean temperatures; and the relocation of entire communities due to rising sea levels and coastal erosion.

**Andrew Welle**, staff attorney with Our Children’s Trust said:

“The statute under which the Alaska legislature created the ADEC specifically requires the agency to protect the atmosphere ‘as trustee of the environment for present and future generations.’ It’s extremely disappointing that the ADEC has denied the petition, failing to uphold this legal and ethical obligation to Alaska’s youth while it continues to authorize dangerous levels of emissions that imperil their futures. In focusing on the short-term economic consequences of reducing emissions, the ADEC ignores the staggering economic and social costs of climate change resulting from business as usual and its impacts to youths’ inalienable rights. We will continue to support the petitioners and are confident that the law will vindicate their fundamental right to a stable climate and livable future.”

The petition is one of many related legal actions brought by youth in several states and countries, supported by Our Children’s Trust, seeking science-based action by governments to stabilize the climate system.

**Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA)** is a program that inspires and trains youth leaders to impact issues by providing leadership skills training and supporting youth-led community action projects and campaigns. AYEA has engaged over 5,000 teens since it started in 1998 through an array of local and statewide campaigns and projects. Youth in AYEA come
from a diverse array of cultural, geographic, economic, and social backgrounds. AYEA is a program of The Alaska Center.

Our Children's Trust is a nonprofit organization, elevating the voice of youth, those with most to lose, to secure the legal right to a healthy atmosphere and stable climate on behalf of present and future generations. We lead a coordinated global human rights and environmental justice campaign to implement enforceable science-based Climate Recovery Plans that will return atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration to below 350 ppm by the year 2100.

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