

Youth claim climate victory in Montana court

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Young people in Montana have [won a landmark victory](#) in claiming that the state's failure to address climate change violates the rights of current and future generations. The recent ruling now requires the state to consider greenhouse gas emissions when reviewing permits for fossil fuel projects.

A group of residents, aged 5 through 22, filed a lawsuit in March 2020 charging that Montana's State Energy Policy Act is unconstitutional. The law prohibits the state from considering the impacts of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions in its environmental reviews of energy projects. A district court in August 2023 agreed with the plaintiffs that the law violates the public's right to a clean and healthful environment under the state's constitution. The state supreme court affirmed that ruling on Dec. 14, 2024.

The case is among several lawsuits filed over the past 10 years by young people claiming harms from the federal government's and state governments' failure to take bold action on climate change.

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Institute Leadership Team signed onto "friends of the court" briefs in support of a [federal lawsuit first filed by young people](#) in 2015. That case is still moving through legal processes, and on Jan. 13, 2025, 43 members of Congress signed a brief urging the U.S. Supreme Court to let the case proceed.

Sisters in Rhode Island have supported youth making similar claims against that state.

The Montana ruling is the first climate victory for young plaintiffs in the courts. In a separate case last year, [Hawaii settled out of court with youth](#) in a move that commits the state to fully de-carbonize its transportation systems by 2045.

In these cases, young people share how climate change is already affecting their health, income, and heritage. Examples include extreme summer heat, smoke-filled skies, major floods, and the disruption of Native cultural practices tied to seasonal cycles.