



Calling All Lawyers!

Our Town of Somerset government has been busy focusing on our own sustainable behaviors at home, such as shorter showers, cloth napkins, eating less/no meat, digital newspapers, driving EVs, using less plastic, recycling, repurposing, lots of things! As a Town, we have also focused on many sustainable activities, such as LED streetlights, solar panels, banning pesticides on our lawns, to name a few (see the whole list here: <https://bit.ly/4feCtWO>). All of these things are great, and our collective behavior has influenced our friends and extended families, as well as other municipalities, both far and wide. Congrats to us all!

Unfortunately, the main juggernaut for accelerating our march toward a more sustainable future to combat climate change and rising ocean levels is convincing governments and large corporations, primarily the large banks and fossil fuel companies, to be more sustainable and invest in sustainable energy and sustainable technologies. Apparently, the enormous profits they enjoy disincentivize them to make this shift, despite the significant economic opportunities of sustainable technologies.

Fortunately, the law is on our side and there are now thousands of lawsuits worldwide fighting to force companies, cities, and countries to change their ways. Below are a few examples:

- Ocean Vision Legal is a law firm focused on litigating on behalf of the oceans. As founder and lawyer Anna von Rebay states, "the ocean can't stand up for itself." (<https://bit.ly/3WxZ21l>)
- A group called Kitu Kara has successfully sued the city of Quito, Ecuador, for polluting the Machángara River, which flows through the city. This ruling has been described as "historic" and although the city is appealing, they must in the interim begin to clean the river. (<https://bit.ly/3y5mR7v>)
- A dozen climate youth activists successfully sued the State of Hawaii to "require the state to cut its transportation sectors' planet-warming pollution, claiming that they have a constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment." This historic lawsuit shows the power of the people. (<https://bit.ly/4cQU0p>)



Mother Earth Project Co-Director Kallan Benson stands before the US Supreme Court demanding better climate laws, Getty Images

In the meantime, we are experiencing heat waves in DC that used to last a week in the 1980s, but now continue for many weeks each year. And as we now know, each year is not an anomaly, it is a new baseline. In other words, what we are experiencing this year will only get worse in future years. Sadly, a lot of people in the U.S. have died already this year from heatstroke. As I write this article, my second-floor air conditioning is broken and thus the bedrooms' temperature is 93, but fortunately I have another air conditioning unit for the lower floor. Thus, I can partially feel the desperation of many nationwide. I guess I am fortunate – at least for the moment.

My personal hope is to inspire all lawyers or aspiring lawyers – many of whom live in Somerset – to consider participating in helping to bring lawsuits against these entities that are resisting or ignoring our present unsustainable and dire situation. For sure, there are now millions of sustainable soldiers worldwide focused on this all-important task, but we could use a few more lawyers!

If you have any questions or ideas about how our Town can be more sustainable, please contact the Environment Committee at tos.environmentcommittee@gmail.com.