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22 Youth Sue Donald Trump Over Executive Orders That Escalate Climate Crisis

Butte, MT— Twenty-two young Americans [filed](#) *Lighthiser v. Trump* in the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana—a constitutional right to life case that directly challenges the President’s executive orders to “unleash” fossil fuels and dismantle climate protections. The plaintiffs—primarily youth from Montana, along with others from Hawai‘i, Oregon, California, and Florida—are suing President Donald J. Trump and numerous federal agencies, including the Department of Energy, Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, and NASA. The case targets a coordinated set of executive actions issued earlier this year that accelerate fossil fuel development and amount to a wholesale attack on clean renewable energy and climate science—escalating the climate emergency and threatening the constitutional rights of young people.

Under President Trump’s direction, these agencies are accused of advancing a methodical scheme that prioritizes fossil fuel expansion, climate science suppression, and actively undermines congressional mandates designed to protect public health, environmental safety, and scientific integrity.

The lawsuit challenges Executive Orders 14156, 14154, and 14261, which declare a so-called “National Energy Emergency,” direct agencies to “unleash American energy” through fossil fuel development, accelerate oil, gas, and coal production on federal lands, block clean energy projects, and suppress public access to federal climate science. The plaintiffs argue these actions knowingly increase greenhouse gas pollution, violate their

constitutional rights, and unlawfully override laws passed by Congress to protect public health and the environment.

“Trump’s fossil fuel orders are a death sentence for my generation,” said named plaintiff Eva Lighthiser. “I’m not suing because I want to — I’m suing because I have to. My health, my future, and my right to speak the truth are all on the line. He’s waging war on us with fossil fuels as his weapon, and we’re fighting back with the Constitution.”

The executive orders are not grounded in economic or scientific reality. Wind and solar are now the cheapest and safest forms of energy in the United States—even before factoring in the broader costs to public health, the economy, and the climate. Yet instead of supporting these proven solutions to the climate emergency and health crisis—along with battery storage, energy efficiency, and electric vehicles—the executive orders block them outright, locking the nation into deeper fossil fuel dependence.

The plaintiffs argue that the executive orders violate their Fifth Amendment rights to life and liberty by deliberately worsening climate pollution that threatens their health and futures. They also assert that the President exceeded his constitutional and statutory authority—acting *ultra vires*—by issuing orders that attempt to override anti-pollution laws such as the Clean Air Act and the law requiring the National Climate Assessment, and dismantle critical climate science infrastructure. Additionally, under the state-created danger doctrine, the plaintiffs claim the government is actively creating and escalating climate-related dangers, infringing upon their fundamental rights to personal security.

These young plaintiffs are students, ranchers, scientists-in-training, artists, and educators. They have already suffered climate-related harms such as wildfire evacuations, respiratory injuries, water shortages, extreme flooding, and loss of access to federal climate science data. Several also were plaintiffs in landmark cases like *Held v. Montana* and *Navahine v. Hawai‘i Department of Transportation*, and won their climate rights under state constitutions.

“The Government’s actions irreparably harm our Nation’s most important asset: our Children. The science is irrefutable that humans and their pollution are causing climate change, and that a changing climate will result in a growing list of injuries that are uniquely felt by America’s youngest population,” said Dan Snyder, Director of the Environmental Enforcement Project for Public Justice. “Our children enjoy the same constitutional rights to life and liberty as adults, yet have been tasked with shouldering the impact of a destabilized climate system without ever having a say in the matter. President Trump’s

executive orders are unlawful and intolerable, and these youth plaintiffs shall put an end to it.”

Filed in federal court in Montana, where the majority of the plaintiffs reside, their complaint highlights the immediate consequences of the challenged executive orders. These include pollution permit exemptions for the Colstrip coal-fired power plant, federal approval of expanded mining at the Spring Creek coal mine, cancelation of an electric school bus program, and elimination of funding for climate science programs at local institutions. The lawsuit underscores how President Trump’s executive actions are already harming youth in Montana and the plaintiffs across other states—and why the court must intervene.

If successful, *Lighthouse v. Trump* would win a declaration that the executive orders are unconstitutional, block their implementation, reaffirm the constitutional limits on presidential power, and protect the rights of youth to live healthfully and safely in their home states.

“These executive orders are an overt abuse of power. The President is knowingly putting young people’s lives in danger to serve fossil fuel interests, while silencing scientists and defying laws passed by Congress,” said lead attorney Julia Olson of Our Children’s Trust. “These young plaintiffs refuse to be collateral damage in a fossil fuel war on their future. They are demanding accountability where it still matters—in a court of law. The executive branch is not above the Constitution, and these young people are here to prove it.”

The youth are represented by Our Children’s Trust, in partnership with Gregory Law Group, McGarvey Law, and Public Justice.

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Our Children’s Trust was founded in 2010 on the idea that courts are vital to democracy and empowered to protect our children and the planet. Without a stable climate system, every natural resource we rely upon to exercise our basic human rights—life, liberty, home, happiness—is under threat. Our work will be achieved when there is universal recognition of children’s climate rights by courts around the world and children’s fundamental rights to life on this planet are protected. www.ourchildrenstrust.org

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