

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Government Operations to which was referred Senate
3 Bill No. S.159 entitled “An act relating to the County Governance Study
4 Committee” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and
5 recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting
6 clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 Sec. 1. COUNTY **AND REGIONAL** GOVERNANCE; STUDY
8 COMMITTEE; REPORT

9 (a) Creation. There is created the County **and Regional** Governance Study
10 Committee to enhance and optimize public safety; regional collaboration and
11 planning; efficient, equitable, and transparent public resource allocation; and
12 effective regional public services for individuals and municipalities.

13 (b) Membership. **The Committee shall be, to the extent possible, composed**
14 **of members from geographically diverse regions of the State. The** Committee
15 shall be composed of the following members:

16 (1) **three** current members of the House of Representatives, **who shall**
17 **not be from the same political party,** the first of whom shall be the Chair of the
18 House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, and the
19 second **and third** of whom shall and appointed by the Speaker of the House;
20 and

1 (2) three current members of the Senate, who shall not be from the same
2 political party, the first of whom shall be the Chair of the Senate Committee on
3 Government Operations, and the second and third of whom shall be appointed
4 by the Committee on Committees.

5 (c) Powers and duties.

6 (1) The Committee shall study and make recommendations to the
7 General Assembly on how to improve the structure and organization of county
8 and regional government, including the following items:

9 (A) enhancement and optimization of public safety;

10 (B) enhancement of regional collaboration and planning;

11 (C) efficient, equitable, and transparent allocation of public
12 resources;

13 (D) promotion of effective regional public services for individuals
14 and municipalities;

15 (E) clarification of the role and oversight of elected county officials
16 and their departments;

17 (F) reduction of duplicated public services and promotion of
18 opportunities for intermunicipal collaboration;

19 (G) balance of availability and cost of services across municipalities
20 in each county;

1 (H) mechanisms of county and regional government structures in
2 other states; and

3 (I) impact of climate change and resiliency on the maintenance of
4 public infrastructure, delivery of regional government services, and
5 coordination of regional emergency planning.

6 (2) The Committee shall, where possible, take testimony from and
7 consider the expertise of the Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs, the
8 Vermont Association of County Judges, the Chief Superior Court Judge, the
9 State Court Administrator, the Vermont Association of Planning and
10 Development Agencies, the Vermont Bond Bank, the Vermont Municipal
11 Clerks’ and Treasurers’ Association, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns,
12 Vermont Regional Development Corporations, the Vermont School Boards
13 Association, the Vermont Town and City Management Association, and other
14 relevant stakeholders and experts as deemed appropriate by the Committee.

15 (3) The Committee may, through the Joint Fiscal Office, contract with
16 one or more consultants or institutions to assist with research, preparation of
17 the report, and any other assistance with the Committee’s work deemed
18 necessary by the Committee; provided, however, that a source of funding is
19 secured, whether by grant or appropriation.

20 (d) Assistance. The Committee shall have the administrative, technical,
21 and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the Office of

1 Legislative Counsel, and the Joint Fiscal Office. **The Office of Legislative**
2 **Counsel shall only provide limited legal research and drafting services for any**
3 **statutory amendments recommended by the Committee. The Joint Fiscal**
4 **Office shall execute any consulting contracts on behalf of the committee.**

5 (e) Report. On or before November 1, 2025, the Committee shall report to
6 the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the
7 Senate Committee on Government Operations with its findings and any
8 recommendations for legislative action.

9 (f) Meetings.

10 (1) **The Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations** shall
11 call the first meeting of the Committee to occur on or before September 1,
12 2024.

13 (2) The Committee shall be co-chaired by the Chair of the House
14 Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Chair of
15 the Senate Committee on Government Operations.

16 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

17 (4) The Committee shall cease to exist on July 1, 2026.

18 (g) Compensation and reimbursement.

19 (1) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General
20 Assembly, a legislative member of the Committee serving in the member's
21 capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to per diem compensation and

1 reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than
2 10 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the
3 General Assembly.

4 (2) Other members of the Committee who are not paid for their services
5 by the organization that the member is representing on the Committee shall be
6 entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted
7 under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 10 meetings. These payments shall
8 be made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

9 (h) Appropriation for consulting. The sum of \$50,000.00 is appropriated to
10 the Joint Fiscal Office from the General Fund in fiscal year 2025 to contract
11 with one or more consultants or institutions to assist with research, preparation
12 of the report, and any other assistance with the Committee’s work deemed
13 necessary by the Committee. The Joint Fiscal Office shall use any secured
14 grant funds before using appropriated funds.

15 **Sec. 2. FEDERAL DISASTER FUNDING FOR COUNTY AND**

16 **REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS REPORT**

17 On or before September 15, 2024, the Secretary of Administration shall
18 report to the County and Regional Governance Study Committee on federal
19 funding opportunities resulting from the disaster declaration for the major
20 floodings events of DR-4720, including the received federal funds, the status of
21 pending applications for funding, and potential avenues for additional funds.

1 The Secretary shall provide an analysis of the impact of Vermont’s lack of
2 robust county or regional governance on the receipt of federal emergency
3 funding.

4 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

5 This act shall take effect on passage.

6 And that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: “An act
7 relating to the County and Regional Governance Study Committee”

8

9 (Committee vote: _____)

10

11

Senator _____

12

FOR THE COMMITTEE