

Sec. C.109 COMMITTEE ON CHILD PROTECTION

(a) There is created a Committee on Child Protection. The Committee shall be composed of nine members. Seven members of the Committee shall be members of the Senate, not all from the same political party, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees. The Committee on Committees shall designate two Senators to serve as Co-Chairs of the Committee. Two members of the Committee shall be members of the House of Representatives; one shall be the Chair of the Committee on Judiciary or designee, and the other shall be the Chair of the Committee on Human Services or designee.

(b) The Committee shall investigate and evaluate Vermont's current system of child protection for the purpose of protecting children from abuse and neglect, including:

(1) examining Vermont's laws, policies, and procedures and evaluating whether those laws, policies, and procedures are effective in protecting children;

(2) comparing Vermont's laws, policies, and procedures to those in other jurisdictions and to best practices in the area of child protection;

(3) understanding how federal requirements shape Vermont's laws, policies, and procedures in the child protection system;

(4) examining whether the departments, agencies, branches, and entities that are responsible for child protection cooperate and are effectively fulfilling their role in the child protection system;

(5) examining whether specific crimes or incidents reveal shortcomings in current laws, policies, and procedures in how the current system operates. In doing so, the Committee shall not interfere in any ongoing investigations;

(6) examining how the child protection system operates in different parts of the State and whether similar cases or allegations are handled differently. If the Committee determines that similar cases or allegations are handled differently, the Committee shall examine the reasons for, and results of, those differences;

(7) determining whether legislative or other changes are necessary to improve the child protection system.

(c) The Committee may conduct hearings and may administer oaths to, and examine under oath, any person. The Committee shall have the power, by a majority vote of the Committee, to issue subpoenas to compel the attendance and testimony of witnesses, and the production of books, papers, records, and documents.

(d) Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, the Committee may receive records that are confidential, privileged, or the release of which is restricted under law. All State agencies and

departments shall provide such records to the Committee upon request. Any such records obtained by the Committee shall be exempt from public inspection and copying, shall be kept confidential by the Committee, and shall not be disclosed.

(e) No person who is an employee of the State of Vermont, or of any State, local, county, and municipal department, agency, or entity involved in child protection, and who testifies before, supplies information to, or cooperates with the Committee's investigation shall be subject to retaliation by his or her employer. Retaliation shall include job termination, demotion in rank, reduction in pay, alteration in duties and responsibilities, transfer, or a negative job performance evaluation based on the person's having testified before, supplied information to, or cooperated with the Committee.

(f) The Committee shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Council. The Committee may retain additional legal and other services as necessary.

(g) On or before January 6, 2015, the Committee shall report to the General Assembly its findings and any recommendations for legislative action.

(h) The Committee may meet no more than ten times, unless additional meetings are determined to be necessary by the Co-Chairs and approved by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and Speaker of the House. The Co-Chairs shall call the first meeting of the Committee, and the Committee may hold hearings at whichever locations the Co-Chairs determine to be appropriate. A majority of the members of the Committee shall be physically present at the same location to constitute a quorum. A member may vote only if physically present at the meeting and action shall be taken only if there is both a quorum and a majority vote of all members of the Committee members physically present and voting.

(i) The Committee shall cease to exist on January 6, 2015.

(j) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General Assembly, members of the Committee shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 406.