

To the Vermont House Judiciary Committee ,
Regarding H.492 the Racial Justice Reform Bill:

I am writing to express my support for H.492 (S.116). I am a resident of Woodbury, Vermont and a professor at a college in Vermont. Higher education should be a conduit that brings young talented people into the state and I have been continually impressed by the impact that my institution has had historically on the culture and community of central Vermont. Alums from past decades are entrepreneurs, public servants, and community leaders throughout the region. As our student body becomes increasingly diverse, however, I have become aware that students of color, coming to rural Vermont from elsewhere in the country do not feel safe leaving campus. They are fearful of a state that sees itself as uniquely and distinctly progressive and does not acknowledge or address its racism and biases. They fear being targeted because of the color of their skin and the recent traffic stop data that analyzed by Stephanie Seguino and Nancy Brooks confirms that *their fears are warranted*.

Implicit bias makes this state unwelcoming and dangerous for people of color who are more likely to be pulled over, more likely to be searched, and more likely to be arrested. One result of this (alongside the racial disparities in incarceration rates) is that the state does not become more diverse and the implicit biases in institutions, public service, and communities goes unchecked. The Vermont legislature has known about this for a long time and has made efforts to address it:

In 2008, the Vermont Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights recommended the collection of traffic stop data, and the development and implementation of bias-free policing policies and training, as well as police-community partnerships. Act 134 in 2012 put these recommendations into law and Act 193 (2014) and Act 147 (2016) implemented them through Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council and the development of a model Fair and Impartial Policing policy. It is clear, however, from the data being collected as a result of these earlier acts, that the existing legislation is insufficient to effectively redress racial bias in the state.

H.492 (S.116) adds an essential component by constituting a Racial Justice Oversight Board, tasked with analyzing and reviewing data pertaining to race and the criminal justice system, updating policy in accordance with current best practices, and proactively facilitating partnerships between law enforcement and the communities impacted by it. H.492 creates a sustained and adaptive mechanism to address systemic racism in the state. This is essential for community trust in law enforcement and by extension for the health, growth, and sustainability of the state in an increasingly diverse United States.

The need is real and urgent. Justice for *all* Vermonters impacts all Vermonters. Thank you for your interest and concern and please support this bill and make it into law.

Sincerely,

Otto Muller, PhD