

Testimony on S.281

Establishing a Systemic Racism Mitigation Oversight and Equity Review Board

I recommend that the Committee on House Government Operations vote and pass S.281 to the floor with the following recommended changes:

- Rename the Panel and the "Officer" to reflect the systemic nature of the role responsibilities (for example: "Systemic Racism Mitigation Panel/Officer")
- Provide clarity surrounding the duties and costs associated with this function.
- Ensure that we also address extending protections from explicit bias as protections are rolled back nationally and the racial climate worsens.

Please refer to H. 868 for a model of a bill with these recommended changes.

Reasons to act now and pass S. 281 with changes:

Systemic racism is an issue of life or death for many. The fact that people of color are being targeted and killed throughout the country is disturbing, but even more so is the fact that students of color have higher rates of drug use and imprisonment largely due to the expectations and implicit biases of their teachers, friends and other authorities. This surely affects white people as well since we are friends and family of lost ones.

These reasons along with many others are why we must take up the issue of eliminating systemic racism with the vigor and speed with which we targeted the opiate crisis. As written in the Act 54 report on Racial Disparities in State Systems, it is recommended that "the State prioritize initiatives to reduce and eliminate racial disparities across state systems much as we have prioritized the opiate crisis."

Along with the unfortunate reasons for which this bill must be passed, there will be many benefits to the execution of the recommendations in the report on Act 54. Welcoming and catering services to people of color in our state will realize a great economic and social benefit to all of the Vermont population. Instead of taking away services from a decreasing population, the influx of people will allow for the implementation of better public services (such as transportation), more cultural awareness and sharing, and a population that is resilient to global economic and environmental issues.

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I urge the Committee on House Government Operations to vote and pass S. 281 to the floor with the suggested changes. Vermont can be a role model for other states to target and eliminate systemic racism by taking action now. While we do need more policies immediately to reduce systemic racism in state operations, a board on the implementation of Act 54 is the best available step to take currently.