

Dear members of the House Judiciary Committee, especially my own representative from Middlesex, Kimberly Jessup:

I am writing to ask for your support of the Racial Justice Reform Bill, H.492, which is currently in your committee. This bill would require full implementation of the Fair and Impartial Policing Policy throughout the state, and promote the serious work that needs to be done to mitigate the effects of unconscious bias in our justice system and our state government in general. I have seen with the election of Donald Trump to the presidency that issues of race and national origin in our country are rising to the forefront of our national and local discussions, and this is a perfect time for Vermont to step up and address these challenges head-on.

In my professional life I work with immigrants and refugees, including those who entered this country without inspection or overstayed temporary work visas in order to work in Vermont's dairy industry. Increased fear of federal immigration enforcement, and bias-influenced harassment in these communities is causing parents to cancel scheduled medical appointments, causing children to refuse to go to school, and is causing people to not report crimes to the police. By passing this bill, we can begin to create trust in our Vermont towns, and begin to break down the structures of institutional racism that harm all of us.

I am white. I grew up in a community that was very racially and ethnically mixed. Now that I live in Vermont, where so many people look like me, I find that I quickly identify non-white people as "other," and even wonder what they are doing here, and what they might be up to. I recognize this response in myself, and I know that others must experience the same thing, and that this must be part of the vast racial discrepancies we see in the justice system, and in our schools. We can work to mitigate the effects of this unconscious bias, by learning to recognize it and not act on it, and therefore create a more just and welcoming society. We can all work on this individually, but this bill is a way that we can work on it as a state.

Thank you for your consideration of H.492.

Best regards,

Sarah Braun Hamilton
Middlesex, VT

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