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STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Date: 1/24/2018

To: The Honorable Senator White, Chairwoman, Senate Government
Operations Committee

From: The Honorable Representative Kiah Morris, State of Vermont

Re: ACT 54 – Racial Disparities in State Systems Report

Submitted Testimony

Good Afternoon,

Thank you, Chairwoman White, for inviting me to testify regarding the ACT 54 directed *Racial Disparities in State Systems Report* as submitted by the Human Rights Commission and Attorney General's Office.

When the bill sponsors initiated the legislative work that resulted in the passage of ACT 54, the question before us was clear, what can the state do to address implicit racial bias caused by systemic racism and the negative affects it has on Vermont?

In our state government, we have codified the principles of Results Based Accountability (RBA) to guide our work. RBA asks three simple questions:

- What did we do?
- How much did we do? and
- Is anyone better off because of it?

As we seek to meaningfully impact the lived experiences of Vermonters of color we seek to use these questions to guide our work. In order to do that, we need to look at the various places racial disparity exists and address this intersectionality.

The justice system is the last stop in the timeline for achieving social justice. We need to get our children off of a path towards prison. We need to build a strong economy that includes minority-owned businesses, recruits and retains a diverse workforce. We need reforms in labor laws to ensure that equal pay for equal work happens for all. We need the voices of Vermonters of color at the table helping to lead this much-needed systemic change. Social

justice scholars and advocates agree, the justice system is at the end of this journey. It is not where prevention and social change most effectively occurs. This work requires dedicated action on a long-range basis.

What this report has illustrated is that there is a great opportunity to do meaningful work that is evidence-based, data driven and effective across state government to address the root causes of systemic racism and implicit racial bias in Vermont. The multiple stakeholders that participated and contributed towards this report gave compelling accounts and identification of those collaborative partners who can turn the curve towards achieving true equity in our state.

I am aware of work to address these issues that are underway from the education, economic development and commerce, community health, housing healthcare, tourism and even transportation towards these important aims. Some of this work predates this report, but a notable acceleration of effort has commenced since its release. Now is the time to increase identification of these efforts, gain consensus on a unified strategy, build a framework for stakeholder engagement and implementation of robust evaluation of these efforts. What is needed now, is completion of the work of the Criminal Justice Panel and their directed report and strategic collaboration across state entities using the informed recommendations from both reports.