



Vermont Partnership

FOR FAIRNESS AND DIVERSITY

Re-envisioning H.492/S.116 H.492(S.116) from 30,000 feet

The numbers speak for themselves.

On the one hand Vermont with 17.6% of its population over 65 years old and our median age of 41.3 makes us the second grayest and oldest state in the nation, we have the lowest birth rate in the nation at 50.8 births per 1,000 for women ages 15-44 years old, all but two counties lost youth population ages 15-34 between the 2000 and 2010 census, and we have a need to grow our workforce by 11,000 skilled workers every year for the foreseeable future just to maintain our economic standing.

On the other hand the United States is rapidly becoming a “minority-majority” or “majority-minority” nation. Whichever way you choose to say it, the hue of our population is becoming increasingly blacker and browner. According to demographers seven states and virtually every major metropolitan area have already made the transition with the rest of the nation catching up by the year 2045.

The sixty percent of us born in other states came to Vermont first as tourists, college students, or summer campers. Others of us came here for a conference, on business, or for a new job. Those first impressions left an indelible mark on our psyches and we found ourselves returning to stake our claim in Vermont’s rocky soil.

Vermont’s long-term economic future will be determined by our ability to identify, attract, provide service beyond expectations, and retain business from consumers of color on a massive scale. Vermont can ill afford to willfully ignore or benignly neglect the fastest growing marketplaces created by consumers of color.

We believe that Vermont must position itself as the most desirable destination for consumers and investors of color be they outdoor enthusiasts, college students (and their parents), family tourists, conventioners, entrepreneurs, or venture capitalists.

Racial injustice, often accompanied by negative racial bias, constrains economic growth through the marginalization of productive labor; through discouraging entrepreneurs of color to stake their claim and create jobs in Vermont; and through the inability to connect with consumers of color across the nation. People, particularly people of color, want to conduct business in a place they perceive justice prevails for all, and not just all of a certain kind.

More importantly, that perception must be grounded in fact.

Vermont Partnership supports passage of H.692(S.116) in the hope that the proposed Racial Justice Oversight Board would serve to cross pollinate effective inclusive, equitable, and just practices from selected sectors of state government to other sectors—that the leadership and lessons learned from Vermont State Police, the Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing, and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Transportation can be applied throughout state government.

The legislation could move us in the right direction and telegraph to the multicultural marketplace that Vermont is serious about addressing racial injustice. We envision a Racial Justice Oversight Board whose work product demonstrates an understanding of and effectively responds to the following conditions:

1. The anger, frustration, suffering, and impatience of United States born people of color whose history and cultural narrative engender a deep distrust of government be it law enforcement, health care delivery, or education among other services.
2. An immigrant population that understands the oppression, death and destruction from whence they came and, however, are on the learning curve of understanding the explicit acts and nuances of American-style racism.
3. The presence of state and community actors expending social, political, and financial capital to build trustworthy, inclusive and equitable institutions as one means to effectively address racial injustice.

We envision a Racial Justice Oversight Board that serves to

- identify effective practices that address racial injustice from within and outside of Vermont state government;
- engage elected officials and leadership across all state agencies in sustained discussions to adopt best/promising/effective practices to reduce negative racial bias and promote racial justice within their spheres of influence;
- establish performance baselines from existing data sets (if none exist, agencies must commit to developing such);
- monitor the progress of adopted new practices by state agencies; and
- submit a progress report to the public and legislature every two years.

At ground level H.492 (S.116) is neither the complete nor the perfect solution to the destructiveness of racial injustice in Vermont. As is, the proposed legislation offers multiple conundrums. For example, by what means will the oversight board compel law enforcement agencies to comply with 20 V.S.A. § 2366? Or does the board provide management and oversight of the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council or for all law enforcement agencies in Vermont? And how are “management” and “oversight” defined?

From an altitude of 30,000 feet however the work product of an oversight board focused on the principles of cross-pollination would effectively increase the practice of racial justice across agencies while simultaneously positioning the state for positive economic growth from the multicultural marketplace—a win-win for everyone.