

No. 109. An act relating to creating the State Youth Council.

(H.293)

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FINDINGS, PURPOSE, AND INTENT

(a) Findings. The General Assembly finds the following:

(1) Young Vermonters are one of our State's most important resources.

Youths under 21 years of age represent approximately 24 percent of the Vermont population and reflect Vermont's diversity. They are a group of dynamic, vibrant, and innovative individuals who are finding new ways to have their voices heard and effect the change they wish to see in the world.

(2) Multiple perspectives strengthen decision making and policy development by encouraging innovation, creativity, and change. Including the unique perspectives of young persons improves State policies and programs, including youth-specific services.

(3) Vermont's economy depends on the participation of young persons, and empowering them to provide policy advice will help keep young Vermonters in the State. It will also diversify our economy, making it more competitive and sustainable.

(4) Young persons have the right to be heard and respected. Almost all government policies and decisions have an impact on young persons' lives and youths have the right to influence those decisions, both individually and collectively. Furthermore, involving young persons in political processes helps

build trust in democratic institutions, which in turn protects Vermont's democracy.

(b) Purpose. The purpose of this act is to create the State Youth Council, composed of young Vermonters who will have an official means of providing advice on policies that impact young persons in Vermont.

(c) Intent.

(1) The intent of creating the State Youth Council set forth in this act is to enhance the State's progress in reaching the population-level outcomes set forth in 3 V.S.A. § 2311(b)(6) (Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential) and (9) (Vermont has open, effective, and inclusive government).

(2) The General Assembly further intends to consider the recommendations of the initial State Youth Council created in this act and to subsequently amend the Council's appointing authority, powers, and duties accordingly.

Sec. 2. 3 V.S.A. chapter 53, subchapter 4 is amended to read:

Subchapter 4. Departments, Divisions, Councils and Boards

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§ 3097. STATE YOUTH COUNCIL

(a) Creation. There is created within the Department of Health the State Youth Council (Council) to advise the Governor and the General Assembly on issues affecting young persons in Vermont.

(b) Membership. The Council shall be composed of not more than 28 Vermont resident youths between 11 and 18 years of age at the time of appointment. The interagency workgroup Youth Services Advisory Council shall appoint members from an applicant pool with a focus on prioritizing diversity and inclusion, including characteristics such as county of residence, gender identity, racial identity, disabilities, age, and other characteristics identified by the applicants. The Youth Services Advisory Council shall appoint a minimum of one resident youth from each State county.

(1) The Department of Health shall assist the Youth Services Advisory Council in notifying the public regarding the opportunity for youths to serve on the Council, and the Youth Services Advisory Council shall accept applications for service on the Council. The application process should emphasize the need for diverse, qualified candidates. A successful candidate must demonstrate:

(A) a commitment to inclusion and the youths of the State; and

(B) the ability to work with others and listen to others.

(2) The Youth Services Advisory Council shall appoint members to the Council for three-year staggered terms and shall strive to appoint Council members who represent a variety of youths in the State. The Youth Services Advisory Council shall consult with members of youth advocacy groups concerning initial appointments to establish the Council and then shall consult with the Council regarding appointments for all subsequent terms.

(3) The Council shall elect a chair from among its members.

(4) The Council shall establish an Executive Committee, ad hoc committees as needed, and the following standing committees:

(A) the Youth Voice Committee;

(B) the Education Committee;

(C) the Equity and Anti-Racism Committee;

(D) the Climate Change Committee; and

(E) the Youth Mental Health Committee.

(c) Powers and duties.

(1) The Council may:

(A) meet at least one time per month;

(B) hold up to four public hearings annually in order to take testimony on issues affecting Vermont youths;

(C) gather input from Vermont youths through surveys or polls; and

(D) evaluate the State's progress in reaching the population-level outcomes set forth in section 2311 of this title and recommend to the Joint Committee on Government Accountability any revisions to the population-level indicators for those outcomes the Council finds necessary to better reflect data that impacts Vermont youths.

(2) The Council shall provide advice to the Governor and the General Assembly on policy changes necessary to improve the lives of Vermont youths.

(A) The Governor shall meet annually with the Council to hear and receive the Council's advice and recommendations on policies that impact the youths of Vermont.

(B) The Council shall annually report its advice and recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations and to any other standing committees it deems appropriate. The report may be in verbal form.

(C) The Council shall annually report its advice and recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations and to any other standing committees it deems appropriate on the preservation of Vermont's traditions and the future of Vermont's rural character, activities, and professions.

(D) The Council shall annually report its advice and recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations and to any other standing committees it deems appropriate on the participation of young persons on Vermont's economy and keeping young Vermonters in the State.

(d) Assistance. The Council shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Department of Health to assist with Council-directed activities, including:

(1) assisting with meeting scheduling and logistical support;

(2) providing information technology support; and

(3) providing any technology or technological devices necessary for the Council to perform its duties.

(e) Support. The Council shall also have support from the Youth Services Advisory Council.

(f) Attending meetings.

(1) Members of the Council may attend Council meetings by electronic or other means without being physically present at a designated meeting location as permitted under 1 V.S.A. § 312(a)(2).

(2) The General Assembly finds that such virtual meeting attendance is particularly expedient for Council members from remote areas of the State to participate in meetings, but also encourages Council members to be physically present at meeting locations when possible due to the importance of in-person interaction.

(g) Compensation and reimbursement. Members of the Council shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 16 meetings per calendar year. For purposes of this subsection, “meetings” includes public hearings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the Department of Health.

Sec. 3. STATE YOUTH COUNCIL; INITIAL PROVISIONS

(a) Appointments. The Youth Services Advisory Council shall appoint the initial State Youth Council created by Sec. 2 of this act on or before

November 1, 2022. The initial appointments shall be for two- and three-year terms in order to provide staggered Council member terms.

(b) Training. From funds appropriated to the Department of Health, to assist with State Youth Council-directed activities and in consultation with the Youth Services Advisory Council, the Department shall provide to the State Youth Council training on general State policies, how to formulate policy proposals, government operations, public speaking, meeting etiquette, and leadership.

(c) Duties. In addition to the State Youth Council's duties set forth in Sec. 2 of this act, on or before January 15, 2024 the Council shall recommend to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations the manner in which its members should be appointed or elected and any other amendments to its enabling law.

Sec. 4. SUNSET OF STATE YOUTH COUNCIL

3 V.S.A. § 3097 (State Youth Council) is repealed on February 1, 2026.

Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.

Date Governor signed bill: May 11, 2022