

H.406: An act relating to promoting racial and social equity in economic opportunity and cultural empowerment

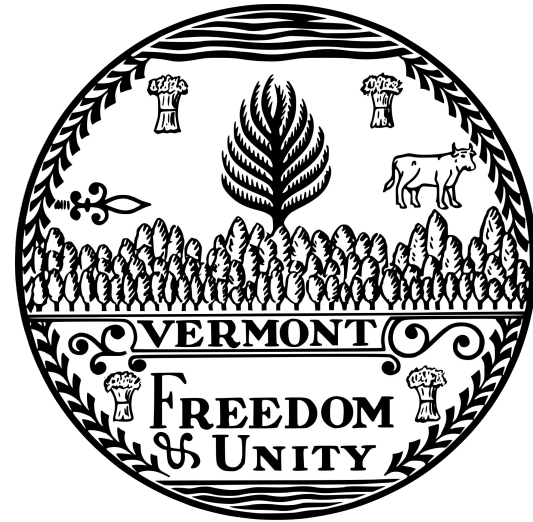
Representative Brian Cina

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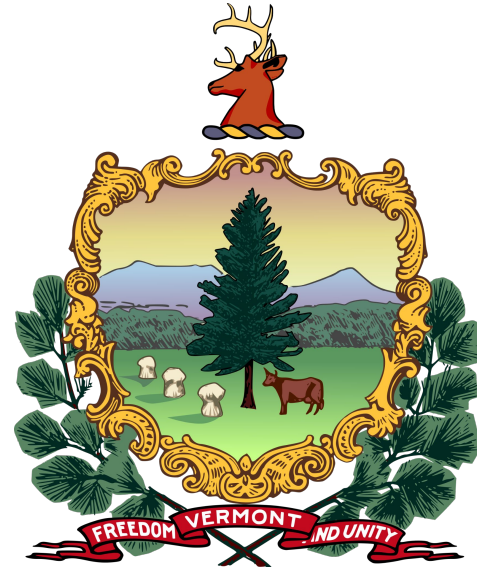
Legislative Intent

Equal opportunity is a fundamental principle of American democracy. Equal access to economic opportunity and to cultural empowerment are priorities of the State of Vermont. However structural racism, defined as the laws, policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other societal norms that work together to deny equal opportunity, structural racism has resulted in wealth disparities and cultural disempowerment among Vermonters. Wealth disparities are a function of not only access to income, but also the ability to have access to land, to property ownership, and to cultural preservation and empowerment, which has been impacted by race, ethnicity, sex, geography, language preference, immigrant or citizen status, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and disability status. Wealth disparities and cultural disempowerment directly and indirectly affect the health and wellness of individuals and communities.



Legislative Intent

The foundation of our current economic system was built on land that was taken from Abenaki and other Indigenous persons, and the structures of our economic system were constructed with the labor of enslaved persons. The legacy of settler colonialism and chattel slavery has been systemic racism and discrimination embedded into many aspects of our modern way of life on this land. The relationship between all persons and the land has been used to oppress persons over the past several centuries. The laws and policies of our State and nation severed Indigenous persons from their land while denying them, Black persons, and other Persons of Color from having the opportunity to access and to own land. These actions of the State led to systemic racism that has impacted all Vermonters who have historically suffered from discrimination and who have not had equal access to public or private economic benefits due to race, ethnicity, sex, geography, language preference, immigrant or citizen status, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, or disability status. The actions of the State have led to the erasure or appropriation of culture for the descendants of slaves and indigenous persons.



Legislative Intent

In order to offer repair for the systemic discrimination faced by many persons throughout the State over the past four centuries, the State of Vermont must engage in a just transition to an economic system that systemically undoes racism instead of reinforcing it. Efforts to remedy wealth disparity in the United States have traditionally looked to the free market economy for solutions to the very problem that it has created. However, there has been increased recognition that improving access to economic opportunity and cultural empowerment will require broader approaches. In order to rectify this history of inequity, we must create economic opportunity and cultural empowerment, using new systems that empower and center Vermonters who have historically suffered from discrimination.



Findings

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Findings

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Purpose

The purpose of this act is to **invest in systems of economic advancement and cultural empowerment** as a way to move towards **greater racial and social equity in wealth distribution, health, resilience, and economic and cultural prosperity.**

Promoting racial and social equity in economic opportunity and cultural empowerment

Adds a fifth principle to *Sec. 4. 10 V.S.A. § 3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; PRINCIPLES; REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT:*

- (1) Vermont's businesses, educators, nongovernmental organizations, and government form a collaborative partnership that results in a highly skilled multigenerational workforce to support and enhance business vitality and individual prosperity.
- (2) Vermont invests in its digital, physical, and human infrastructure as the foundation for all economic development.
- (3) Vermont State government takes advantage of its small scale to create nimble, efficient, and effective policies and regulations that support business growth and the economic prosperity of all Vermonters.
- (4) Vermont leverages its brand and scale to encourage a diverse economy that reflects and capitalizes on our rural character, entrepreneurial people, and reputation for environmental quality.
- (5) Vermont embraces its responsibility to course correct the historical impact of economic exploitation and exclusion from opportunity due to race and ethnicity for American descendants of slavery and the broader Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color community.**

Promoting racial and social equity in economic opportunity and cultural empowerment

Adds to the *Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity's* authorization to allocate available financial assistance for community services agencies and programs for the planning, conduct, administration and evaluation of community service programs to provide a range of services and activities having a measurable and potentially major impact on causes of poverty in the community or in areas of the community where poverty is a particularly acute problem:

- (1) to secure and retain meaningful employment;
- (2) to obtain adequate education;
- (3) to make better use of available income;
- (4) to provide and maintain adequate housing and a suitable living environment;
- (5) to obtain services for the prevention of narcotics addiction, alcoholism, and for the rehabilitation of narcotic addicts and alcoholics;

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- (6) to obtain emergency assistance through loans and grants to meet immediate and urgent individual and family needs, including the need for health services, nutritious food, housing, and unemployment-related assistance
- (7) to remove obstacles and solve personal and family problems which block achievement of self-sufficiency;
- (8) to achieve greater participation in the affairs of the community;
- (9) to make more frequent and effective use of other programs related to the purposes of this chapter;
- (10) to coordinate and establish linkages between governmental and other social service programs to assure the effective delivery of such services to low-income persons; and to encourage the use of entities in the private sector of the community in efforts to ameliorate poverty in the community; and
- (11) to correct the historical impact of economic exploitation and exclusion from opportunity due to race and ethnicity of American descendants of slavery and the broader Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color community.**

Promoting racial and social equity in economic opportunity and cultural empowerment

Creates the **Vermont Department of Cultural Empowerment and Economic Advancement** within the *Agency of Commerce and Community Development*:

(1) works to ensure programming implementation through a **statewide Cultural Empowerment and Economic Advancement Network, consisting of four Community Empowerment Centers located in different regions of Vermont**

(2) uses the **Vermont Department of Cultural Empowerment and Economic Advancement Grant Fund** to design and implement a grant program for qualified organizations and collaboratives led by Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color (BIPOC) that provides grants to support programming through the **Cultural Empowerment and Economic Advancement Network**.

(3) Initial appropriation of **\$10,000,000**.

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The **Vermont Department of Cultural Empowerment and Economic Advancement** administers grants to:

(1) provide cultural empowerment programming to:

- (A) educate on the true history, contributions, and resilience of American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) and other Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color,
- (B) serve as a resource, facilitate, and assist in the implementation of ADOS cultural commemorations and celebrations;
- (C) facilitate various additional cultural activities; and
- (D) serve as a central hub for access, cultivation, creation, and curation of cultural arts;

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The **Vermont Department of Cultural Empowerment and Economic Advancement** administers grants to:

(2) establish the Business Cultivation and Support Program, including:

- (A) small business technical assistance;
- (B) small business grants and loans;
- (C) small business-to-business mentorship program;
- D) technical assistance; and
- E) small business procurement contract assistance;

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Business Development

The Department of Economic Development, in collaboration with the Vermont Economic Development Authority, the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies, the Vermont Small Business Development Center, and other relevant stakeholders, shall design and implement the BIPOC Business Development Program, the purposes of which are to:

- (1) increase the number of, and provide support to, BIPOC business start-ups; and
- (2) provide BIPOC-owned businesses with broader access to capital; and
- (3) provide BIPOC-owned businesses with technical assistance.

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Business Procurement and Career Advancement

The Secretary of Administration shall design and implement the BIPOC Business Procurement Program for all agencies and departments within State government, the purposes of which are to:

- (1) increase State government outreach to BIPOC-owned businesses for participation in bidding for government procurement contracts;
- (2) provide technical and other assistance to BIPOC-owned businesses that seek to participate in the government procurement process; and
- (3) establish a minimum percentage of State procurement contracts or funding that is awarded to BIPOC-owned businesses.

The Secretary of Administration, in consultation with the Racial Equity Director, shall adopt rules that require each Agency and Department in this State to implement policies and procedures designed to create pathways for career advancement for current and future employees who are members of BIPOC communities in this State.

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Continuing Education and Apprenticeship

The Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Vermont State Colleges and the Vermont Training Program within the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, shall design and implement five continuing education and apprenticeship programs for members of BIPOC communities in this State.

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Dismantling Systemic Racism in Vermont

- Acknowledged racial disparities across all systems of state government in [Act 54 \(2017\)](#).
- Committed to "dismantling systemic racism" in [Act 9 \(2018\)](#) and hired the Racial Equity Director.
- Passed [Act 33 \(2021\)](#), which created Health Equity Advisory Commission empowered to address disparities and to promote equity in health care.
- Passed [J.R.H.6 \(2021\)](#), which declared that "racism constitutes a public health emergency in Vermont" and committed to "eradicating systemic racism."
- [PR.2](#), a proposal to amend the constitution to ensure that slavery is completely prohibited to "serve as a foundation for addressing systemic racism in our State's laws and institutions."
- NEXT STEP: Bring in witnesses and hear testimony. Take action on [H.406](#) to continue to follow through on our commitment to eradicating systemic racism by promoting racial and social equity in economic opportunity and cultural empowerment.