

Draft Policies and Best Practices for Committee and Session Livestreaming and Records

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INTRODUCTION

The Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA), a division within the Office of the Secretary of State, administers the Statewide Records and Information Management Program, which provides a broad range of records and information management services to Vermont public agencies at the local and state level. One of those services is serving as the official, permanent repository (the “State Archives”) for inactive state public records and information, regardless of format, that have continuing value to the State and its residents. Another service is providing legislators with historical context, from records in the State Archives, regarding matters of legislative interest and concern.

LEGISLATIVE RECORDS IN THE STATE ARCHIVES

The Vermont State Archives and Records Administration preserves and provides access to Vermont legislative records that date from pre-statehood (c. 1778) through the last biennium (except for Committee audiovisual recordings created after March 2020, which are currently in the process of being transferred to the State Archives).

A card index to hearing transcripts dating from 1966 to 1994 is available in our Reference Room and can be searched by bill number, witnesses, subjects, and committee. A card index to hearing audio recordings from 1985 to 1994 is also available in our Reference Room. This index can be searched by subject, bill number, committee, or witness name. Digital committee records, beginning with the 2015-2016 biennium, are available and searchable online through the digital state archives, [VT Re·tain](#).

VT RE·TAIN

VT Re·tain has served as the State’s digital preservation system and digital state archives since 2015. The underlying application was one of the outcomes of a multi-year, multi-state, Federally funded project to work with selected state legislatures in exploring methods to preserve and provide access to legislative materials in digital form. Led by Minnesota, Vermont was one

of the partner states along with Arkansas, California, Illinois, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Tennessee¹.

VT Re·tain is comprised of two components: a digital preservation system and a public online portal. The digital preservation system is ISO 14721 compliant, meaning that it meets international standards as an open archival information system (OAIS). Compliance with ISO 14721 is critical for any entity that has responsibilities to preserve and make available digital records and information over a long period of time. Unlike paper, digital records and information become inaccessible when the technologies that can “read” them become obsolete. Systems that are ISO 14721 compliant mitigate this risk by preserving the codes for hundreds of file formats (for file readability) while allowing for large-scale conversions to newer formats (for human access).

The [public online portal for VT Re·tain](#) is how government employees and members of the public have been accessing digital committee records, beginning with the 2015-2016 biennium, as well as digital archival records from other state entities that are not exempt under the Vermont Public Records Act from public inspection and copying.

TRANSFERS

Traditionally, Committee records have been transferred to the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration after each biennium. The volume of paper records has been steadily decreasing while the volume of digital records has been steadily increasing. Born digital-records have some unique characteristics in that in-place preservation can occur at any time (digital preservation systems can serve as storage locations and without changing custodians) and preservation activities, including the transfer of digital records and information, can be automated. The Vermont State Archives and Records Administration has participated in two digital preservation and transfer proof-of-concept pilots this year, for which testimony will be provided to the Advisory Committee on the Records of (the United States) Congress this Friday.

¹ For more information, see “A Model Technical and Social Architecture for the Preservation of State Government Digital Information” project site: <https://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/legislative/records/>