

1 S.30

2 An act relating to creating a Sister State Program

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

4 Sec. 1. VERMONT SISTER STATE PROGRAM; WORKING GROUP

5 (a) Creation. There is created the Vermont Sister State Program Working
6 Group for the purpose of determining the administration, oversight, scope, and
7 objectives of a Vermont Sister State Program.

8 (b) Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following
9 members:

10 (1) the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development or
11 designee;

12 (2) the Secretary of Education or designee;

13 (3) the Secretary of Agriculture or designee;

14 (4) the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Vermont Arts Council or
15 designee of the Board of the Trustees;

16 (5) the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Vermont Council on
17 World Affairs or designee of the Board of the Directors;

18 (6) the Vermont Adjutant General or designee; and

19 (7) three members with experience in educational or cultural exchanges
20 or in international affairs to be appointed as follows:

21 (A) one member by the Governor;

22 (B) one member by the Senate Committee on Committees; and

1 (C) one member by the Speaker of the House.

2 (c) Meetings.

3 (1) The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development or
4 designee shall call the first meeting of the Working Group to occur on or
5 before September 1, 2024.

6 (2) The Working Group shall select a chair from among its members at
7 the first meeting.

8 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

9 (4) In furtherance of its duties, the Working Group is encouraged to
10 solicit input and participation from interested stakeholders, including those
11 with experience in cultural exchange or in international relations, agriculture,
12 trade, education, arts, recreation, or governance.

13 (d) Powers and duties. The Working Group shall review sister state
14 programs in other jurisdictions and receive testimony from relevant
15 stakeholders in order to make recommendations for legislative action. In
16 conducting its analysis, the Working Group shall consider and make
17 recommendations on the following:

18 (1) which department in State government is best suited to administer,
19 house, and provide support to the Program;

20 (2) the makeup of the membership of the Committee overseeing the
21 Program;

1 (3) sources of funding that will financially support the Program;

2 (4) specific objectives of the Program that align with the following
3 goals:

4 (A) that the Program exist to create, administer, and maintain
5 mutually beneficial and long-lasting partnerships between Vermont and other
6 select countries or provinces;

7 (B) that the Program promote peace, human rights, and
8 environmental sustainability;

9 (C) that the Program foster the connection of immigrants and refugee
10 communities in Vermont with their nations of origin;

11 (D) that the Program promote and foster cultural exchange, tourism,
12 trade, and education between Vermont and Sister States; and

13 (E) that through the Program, the Committee communicate with and
14 support military personnel, foreign service officers, aid organizations,
15 nongovernmental organizations, Peace Corps volunteers, and any other
16 relevant entities working in Sister States.

17 (5) the criteria for evaluating proposed and existing Sister State
18 agreements;

19 (6) the requirements for creating and managing Sister State agreements,
20 including:

21 (A) the term length for agreements; and

1 (B) the appropriate number of active agreements at one time; and
2 (7) any other issue the Working Group deems relevant to the success of
3 the Vermont Sister State Program.

4 (e) Compensation and reimbursement.

5 (1) A nonlegislative member of the Working Group shall be entitled to
6 per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under
7 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 10 meetings. These payments shall be
8 made from monies appropriated to the Agency of Commerce and Community
9 Development.

10 (2) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General
11 Assembly, a legislative member of the Working Group serving in the
12 member's capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to per diem compensation
13 and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than 10
14 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the
15 General Assembly.

16 (f) Reporting.

17 (1) An initial report on the Working Group's progress on the work set
18 forth in this section shall be submitted to the General Assembly on or before
19 February 15, 2025.

20 (2) A final report shall include the Working Group's findings and
21 recommendations for legislative language based on the requirements set forth

1 in this section. The report shall also include the names of the stakeholders that
2 the Working Group heard from during its work. The report shall be submitted
3 to the General Assembly on or before November 1, 2025.

4 (g) Expiration. The Working Group shall cease to exist on March 31,
5 2026.

6 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

7 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.