

1 S.159

2 An act relating to the County and Regional Governance Study Committee

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

4 Sec. 1. COUNTY AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE STUDY

5 COMMITTEE; REPORT

6 (a) Creation. There is created the County and Regional Governance Study
7 Committee to address local government capacity challenges, enhance and
8 optimize public safety, regional collaboration and planning, efficient,
9 equitable, and transparent public resource allocation, and effective regional
10 public services for individuals and municipalities.

11 (b) Membership. The Committee shall be, to the extent possible, composed
12 of members from geographically diverse regions of the State. The Committee
13 shall be composed of the following members:

14 (1) three current members of the House of Representatives, who shall
15 not all be from the same political party, the first of whom shall be the Chair of
16 the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, and the
17 second and third of whom shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

18 (2) three current members of the Senate, who shall not all be from the
19 same political party, the first of whom shall be the Chair of the Senate
20 Committee on Government Operations, and the second and third of whom
21 shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees.

22 (c) Powers and duties.

- 1 (1) The Committee shall study and make recommendations to the
2 General Assembly on how to improve the structure and organization of county
3 and regional government, including:
- 4 (A) enhancement and optimization of public safety;
5 (B) enhancement of regional collaboration and planning;
6 (C) efficient, equitable, and transparent allocation of public
7 resources;
- 8 (D) promotion of effective regional public services for individuals
9 and municipalities;
- 10 (E) clarification of the role and oversight of elected county officials
11 and their departments;
- 12 (F) reduction of duplicated public services and promotion of
13 opportunities for intermunicipal collaboration;
- 14 (G) balance of availability and cost of services across municipalities
15 in each county;
- 16 (H) mechanisms of county and regional government structures in
17 other states; and
- 18 (I) impact of climate change and resiliency on the maintenance of
19 public infrastructure, delivery of regional government services, and
20 coordination of regional emergency planning.

1 (2) The Committee may, through the Joint Fiscal Office, contract with
2 one or more consultants to assist with research, preparation of the report, and
3 any other assistance with the Committee's work deemed necessary by the
4 Committee.

5 (d) Assistance. The Committee shall have the administrative, technical,
6 and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the Office of
7 Legislative Counsel, and the Joint Fiscal Office.

8 (e) Report. On or before November 1, 2025, the Committee shall report to
9 the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the
10 Senate Committee on Government Operations with its findings and any
11 recommendations for legislative action.

12 (f) Meetings.

13 (1) The Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations shall
14 call the first meeting of the Committee to occur on or before September 1,
15 2024.

16 (2) The Committee shall be co-chaired by the Chair of the House
17 Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Chair of
18 the Senate Committee on Government Operations.

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

20 (4) The Committee shall cease to exist on July 1, 2026.

1 (g) Compensation and reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during
2 adjournment of the General Assembly, a legislative member of the Committee
3 serving in the member's capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to per diem
4 compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for
5 not more than 10 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies
6 appropriated to the General Assembly.

7 Sec. 2. COUNTY AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE TECHNICAL
8 ADVICE

9 (a) On or before September 1, 2024, the Executive Director of the Vermont
10 Bond Bank, shall convene the first meeting of a County and Regional
11 Governance Technical Advisory Group. The Technical Advisory Group shall
12 analyze the subject matter being considered by the County and Regional
13 Governance Study Committee and advise, assist, and provide
14 recommendations to the Study Committee, specifically on the structure and
15 organization of county and regional government. The Vermont Bond Bank
16 shall participate in order to support improvements to local capacity.

17 (b) The following individuals and entities shall be invited to participate in
18 the meeting or meetings described in this section:

19 (1) the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs;

20 (2) the State Court Administrator;

21 (3) the Vermont Association of County Judges;

- 1 (4) the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies;
- 2 (5) the Vermont Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Association;
- 3 (6) the Vermont League of Cities and Towns;
- 4 (7) the Vermont Regional Development Corporations;
- 5 (8) the Vermont School Boards Association;
- 6 (9) the Vermont Town and City Management Association; and
- 7 (10) other relevant stakeholders identified by the Technical Advisory
- 8 Group.

9 (c) The Study Committee may at any time request advice from the
10 Technical Advisory Group regarding issues relating to the structure and
11 organization of county and regional government, which shall be provided by
12 the Technical Advisory Group.

13 Sec. 3. FEDERAL DISASTER FUNDING FOR COUNTY AND
14 REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS REPORT

15 On or before September 15, 2024, the Secretary of Administration, or
16 designee, shall report to the County and Regional Governance Study
17 Committee on federal funding opportunities resulting from the disaster
18 declaration for the major flooding events of 2023 in the State, including the
19 received federal funds, the status of pending applications for funding, and
20 potential avenues for additional funds. The Secretary, or designee, shall

1 provide an analysis of the impact of Vermont's lack of robust county or
2 regional governance on the receipt of federal emergency funding.

3 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

4 This act shall take effect on passage.