

Racial Equity Advisory Panel 2023 Report to the Legislature January 15, 2023

INTRODUCTION

This report is provided to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations in accordance with 3 V.S.A. Sec. 5002(c)(3).

The 2023 report of the Executive Director of Racial Equity (EDRE) will provide more detail on these topics, but the following represent the highlights of the work discussed by the Panel at its meetings during 2022.

The Racial Equity Advisory Panel (REAP) had a year of transition, with two previous Panel members' tenures expiring and new Panel members appointed by the Committee on Committees and Human Rights Commission, respectively. The Panel member appointed by the Governor and whose tenure is expiring this year has, after much consideration, resigned their position. No replacement has been named by the Governor, to date.

- The Panel supported the EDRE and the Agency of Administration's Office of Racial Equity (ORE) in expanding the existing Equity Impact Assessment tool that had been established in 2021.
- The Panel supported the EDRE in obtaining support and funding for the two new hires to the Office of Racial Equity (ORE): an Education & Outreach Associate and a Policy & Research Analyst.
- The Panel supported the EDRE in obtaining funding and implementation of the IDEAL Vermont Initiative (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action, Leadership). IDEAL Vermont is a coalition of Vermont municipalities dedicated to advancing racial and other forms of equity across the state through shared learning and tangible action.
- Chair Brett sent a letter of support for the initiative to the Sec. of Administration as agreed upon by the Panel.
- The Panel supported the EDRE in standing up the Division of Racial Justice Statistics within the ORE. The hiring process for the Division leadership position is in progress, with two other staff positions to follow.
- The Panel continues to support the EDRE to procure funding for statewide Language Access and Justice and anything that may be needed in order to have a successful and effective protocol for the State of Vermont.

- The Panel completed a daylong, internal working session retreat over the summer. One of the goals from that session was to dedicate time to review reports and recommendations from other equity work groups to note potential overlap with the work of the ORE to provide support for efficient and structured equity work across the State of Vermont.

REPORT

I. Charge of the Racial Equity Advisory Panel (Panel) pursuant to 3 V.S.A. Sec. 5002(c):

c) The Panel shall have the following duties and responsibilities:

(1) work with the Executive Director of Racial Equity to implement the reforms identified as necessary in the comprehensive organizational review as required by subsection 5003(a) of this title;

(2) advise the Executive Director to ensure ongoing compliance with the purpose of this chapter, and advise the Governor on strategies for remediating systemic racial disparities in statewide systems of government; and

(3) on or before January 15, 2020, and annually thereafter, report to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations on:

(A) the extent to which the State is achieving the performance targets and measures as developed pursuant to subsection 5003(c) of this title; and

(B) the nature and quality of the collaboration between the Governor's Cabinet and the Executive Director.

II. Panel Members

- Andrea Brett, Chair, appointed by Speaker of the House
- Superior Judge Nancy Waples, appointed by Chief Justice
- Clarence Davis, appointed by Governor Scott
- Zoraya Hightower, appointed by the Senate Committee on Committees
- Weiwei Wang, appointed by the Human Rights Commission

III. Panel Work

The Panel held eight meetings during 2022. The following represents progress on the Panel's duties and responsibilities:

1) The extent to which the State is achieving the performance targets and measures as developed pursuant to subsection 5003(c) of this title.

The EDRE is working with other State agencies to ensure that equity benchmarks are included in agency-level planning as the Statewide Equity Plan is infused within the Strategic Plan.

ORE contracted with a vendor to gather input from minority and women-owned businesses about ways the State can be more supportive of their business development. This also brought additional funding from the Legislature for translation services.

IDEAL Vermont launched on October 26, 2022, and ten municipalities have applied to the program so far with each applicant being vetted by ORE staff. The program provides support to town leaders who undertake equity projects at the municipal level.

The ORE convened a group of 48 stakeholders for facilitated conversations about the creation of a statewide language access plan that would apply to all three branches of government. The initiative would require written materials, audio and visual enhancements, and training for interpreters such as creation of a licensure or certification process. The Judiciary has instituted their Language Access Plan aimed at increasing access to the courts for residents who are not proficient in English. This includes providing in-person and remote interpretation, translation of vital court documents, and training to promote access to these resources.

Legislative advancements over the last year include: House Resolution 729, which established a six-year statute of limitations for discrimination claims in employment, housing, and public accommodations; Proposal 2, which amended the Vermont Constitution to outlaw slavery in all instances; and Senate Resolution 226, which set aside grant funding for first generation home buyers and outreach to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) populations to ensure their awareness of these benefits.

2) The nature and quality of the collaboration between the Governor's Cabinet and the Executive Director:

The Executive Director of the Office of Racial Equity (EDRE) reports that the Cabinet continues to be responsive to her efforts to create a more equitable workplace, through promotion and analysis of the racial impact of programs and services offered by government, and the ongoing assignment of Equity Liaisons in each agency and/or department. The EDRE, with the Panel's support, will be creating, scheduling, and incorporating regular and ongoing trainings on racial equity and justice for the State Legislature.

Chair Brett reached out to the Governor's Cabinet through Secretary of Administration, Kristin Clouser, and Chief Prevention Officer, Monica Hutt. They confirmed that the administration has a close working relationship with the EDRE, Xusana Davis, who is viewed as an important member of the team and participates in weekly meetings with both the Cabinet and Governor.

They verified that the State has implemented and continues to work with an Equity Impact Assessment tool for all policies and programs. Equity Liaisons continue to be present in every agency and department within State government and continue to implement policies and proposed legislative changes.

In addition, an “equity lens” has been incorporated into everything the State does, though both acknowledged continued room for improvement within all State offices. The Panel acknowledges that although the majority of the work of the EDRE is positive, there continue to be challenges when implementing equity policies within State Government. Ms. Hutt expressed that Executive Director Davis is able to have the hard conversations about racial equity and justice in a manner that is non-abrasive and non-confrontational. The Panel acknowledges and supports that the scope of work the EDRE and the Office of Racial Equity has grown to an extent that the ORE would benefit from adding a position for an Executive Assistant and/or Staff Assistant.

Racial Equity Advisory Panel

Andrea Brett

Andrea Brett, Chair

01/15/2023

Dated