

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Government Operations to which was referred Senate
3 Bill No. 159 entitled “An act relating to the County Governance Study
4 Committee” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and
5 recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting
6 clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 Sec. 1. COUNTY AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE STUDY

8 COMMITTEE; REPORT

9 (a) Creation. There is created the County and Regional Governance Study
10 Committee to enhance and optimize public safety; regional collaboration and
11 planning; efficient, equitable, and transparent public resource allocation; and
12 effective regional public services for individuals and municipalities.

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

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

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

5 (c) Powers and duties.

6 (1) The Committee shall study and make recommendations to the
7 General Assembly on how to improve the structure and organization of county
8 and regional government, including:

9 (A) enhancement and optimization of public safety;

10 (B) enhancement of regional collaboration and planning;

11 (C) efficient, equitable, and transparent allocation of public
12 resources;

13 (D) promotion of effective regional public services for individuals
14 and municipalities;

15 (E) clarification of the role and oversight of elected county officials
16 and their departments;

17 (F) reduction of duplicated public services and promotion of
18 opportunities for intermunicipal collaboration;

19 (G) balance of availability and cost of services across municipalities
20 in each county;

1 (H) mechanisms of county and regional government structures in
2 other states; and

3 (I) impact of climate change and resiliency on the maintenance of
4 public infrastructure, delivery of regional government services, and
5 coordination of regional emergency planning.

6 (2) The Committee may, through the Joint Fiscal Office, contract with
7 one or more consultants to assist with research, preparation of the report, and
8 any other assistance with the Committee’s work deemed necessary by the
9 Committee.

10 (d) Assistance. The Committee shall have the administrative, technical,
11 and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the Office of
12 Legislative Counsel, and the Joint Fiscal Office.

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

17 (f) Meetings.

18 (1) The Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations shall
19 call the first meeting of the Committee to occur on or before September 1,
20 2024.

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

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

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

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

12 (h) Appropriation for consulting. The sum of \$50,000.00 is appropriated to
13 the Joint Fiscal Office from the General Fund in fiscal year 2025 to contract
14 with one or more consultants to assist with research, preparation of the report,
15 and any other assistance with the Committee’s work deemed necessary by the
16 Committee.

17 **Sec. 2. COUNTY AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE TECHNICAL**

18 **ADVICE**

19 (a) On or before September 1, 2024, the Executive Director of the Vermont
20 Bond Bank, shall convene the first meeting of a County and Regional
21 Governance Technical Advisory Group to analyze the subject matter being

1 considered by the County and Regional Governance Study Committee and to
2 advise, assist, and provide recommendations to the Study Committee,
3 specifically on the structure and organization of county and regional
4 government.

5 (b) The following individuals and entities may be included in the meeting
6 or meetings described in this section:

7 (1) the Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs;

8 (2) the State Court Administrator;

9 (3) the Vermont Association of County Judges;

10 (4) the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies;

11 (5) the Vermont Municipal Clerks’ and Treasurers’ Association;

12 (6) the Vermont League of Cities and Towns;

13 (7) the Vermont Regional Development Corporations;

14 (8) the Vermont School Boards Association;

15 (9) the Vermont Town and City Management Association; and

16 (10) other relevant stakeholders identified by the Technical Advisory
17 Group.

18 (c) On or before June 30, 2025, the Technical Advisory Group shall
19 provide a written report to the Study Committee with its findings on
20 optimizing the structure and organization of county and regional

1 government in the State and include any recommendations for legislative
2 action.

3 (d) The Study Committee may at any time request advice from the
4 Technical Advisory Group regarding issues relating to the structure and
5 organization of county and regional government.

6 Sec. 3. FEDERAL DISASTER FUNDING FOR COUNTY AND
7 REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS REPORT

8 On or before September 15, 2024, the Secretary of Administration shall
9 report to the County and Regional Governance Study Committee on federal
10 funding opportunities resulting from the disaster declaration for the major
11 flooding events of 2023 in the State, including the received federal funds, the
12 status of pending applications for funding, and potential avenues for additional
13 funds. The Secretary shall provide an analysis of the impact of Vermont’s lack
14 of robust county or regional governance on the receipt of federal emergency
15 funding.

16 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

17 This act shall take effect on passage.

18 And that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: “An act
19 relating to the County and Regional Governance Study Committee”

20

21 (Committee vote: _____)

1

2

Senator _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE