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H.67

Introduced by Representatives Boyden of Cambridge, Waters Evans of
Charlotte, and Garofano of Essex

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Legislative operations; government accountability

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to create the
Joint Government Oversight and Accountability Committee. It proposes to
change the default submission date for periodic reports to the General
Assembly and to update the legislative reports database.

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An act relating to legislative operations and government accountability

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

~~*** Purpose and Findings ***~~

Sec. 1. PURPOSE

(a) The purpose of this act is to actuate the principle of government
accountability by focusing on how evidence is used to inform policy, how our
State laws are carried out, and how legislation can best be formed to achieve
its intended outcomes. This act strives to systematize government
accountability efforts as much as possible with simple, clear, independent,

1 ~~objective, and fact-based processes rather than to rely upon individual~~
2 ~~legislators or individual committees to be effective.~~

3 (b) Government accountability means the principle of demanding that
4 legislation succeeds in achieving its stated policy goals through the provision
5 of means by which to measure whether the policy goals have been met. The
6 metrics for determining whether success has been achieved are as important as
7 the goals themselves.

8 (c) Government oversight means the mechanisms put into place to ensure
9 that the bodies of government tasked with executing legislative intent are
10 properly doing so. Oversight by the General Assembly is the examination of
11 the processes followed and the information produced by government officials
12 executing the law to determine whether those officials are properly and
13 adequately achieving the policy goals established by the General Assembly.

14 * * * Creation of the Joint Government Oversight and Accountability

15 Committee * * *

16 Sec. 2. 2 V.S.A. chapter 28 is added to read:

17 CHAPTER 28. JOINT GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT AND
18 ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

19 § 971. CREATION OF COMMITTEE

20 (a) There is created the Joint Government Oversight and Accountability
21 Committee, whose membership shall be appointed each biennial session of the

1 ~~General Assembly. The Committee shall work independently and with other~~
2 legislative committees to assist with matters related to government oversight
3 and issues of significant public concern.

4 (b) The Committee shall be composed of eight members: four members of
5 the House of Representatives, not more than two of whom shall be from the
6 same party, appointed by the Speaker of the House; and four members of the
7 Senate, not more than two of whom shall be from the same party, appointed by
8 the Committee on Committees. In addition to two members-at-large appointed
9 from each chamber, one appointment shall be made from each of the House
10 Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, the Senate
11 Committee on Government Operations, and the House and Senate Committees
12 on Appropriations.

13 (c) The Committee shall elect a chair, vice chair, and clerk from among its
14 members and shall adopt rules of procedure. The position of chair shall rotate
15 biennially between the House and the Senate members. The Committee shall
16 keep minutes of its meetings and maintain a file thereof. A quorum shall
17 consist of five members.

18 (d) The Committee shall meet as necessary for the prompt discharge of its
19 duties.

20 (e) For attendance at a meeting when the General Assembly is not in
21 session, members of the Committee shall be entitled to compensation for

1 ~~services and reimbursement of expenses as provided under subsection 22(a) of~~
2 ~~this title.~~

3 ~~(f) The professional and clerical services of the Joint Fiscal Office, the~~
4 ~~Office of Legislative Operations, and the Office of Legislative Counsel shall~~
5 ~~be available to the Committee.~~

6 ~~§ 972. DUTIES AND POWERS~~

7 ~~(a) Duties. The Committee shall have duties as described in this section~~
8 ~~and elsewhere in law.~~

9 ~~(1)(A) The Committee shall exercise government oversight by~~
10 ~~examining and investigating matters of significant public concern relating to~~
11 ~~State government performance. The Committee shall examine the possible~~
12 ~~reasons for any failure of government oversight and provide findings and~~
13 ~~tangible recommendations to standing committees of jurisdiction to prevent~~
14 ~~future failures.~~

15 ~~(B) The Committee will select issues of significant public concern to~~
16 ~~examine and investigate by a majority of the current Committee members who~~
17 ~~have not recused themselves from the matter. The Committee shall consider~~
18 ~~issues of significant public concern referred to the Committee pursuant to a~~
19 ~~resolution adopted by either chamber of the General Assembly.~~

20 ~~(C) As used in this section, an “issue of significant public concern”~~
21 ~~means any issue that.~~

- 1 (i) affects the State as a whole;
- 2 (ii) affects a vulnerable population;
- 3 (iii) costs the State more than \$100,000,000.00;
- 4 (iv) implicates a serious failure of State government oversight or
5 accountability;
- 6 (v) arises from previously enacted legislation; or
- 7 (vi) constitutes a failure to adequately respond to State or federal
8 audits.
- 9 (2) The Committee shall, with coordination from the Legislative
10 Committee on Administrative Rules, evaluate executive entities directed to
11 adopt rules to ensure consistency and accountability in the rulemaking process.
- 12 (3) The Committee shall, on an annual basis, issue a report that
13 includes:
- 14 (A) which issues of significant public concern the Committee has
15 examined and investigated, including relevant information and data;
- 16 (B) the Committee's current objectives for review of issues of
17 significant public concern and which objectives, to date, have and have not
18 been met;
- 19 (C) the Committee's objectives for review of issues of significant
20 public concern for the upcoming two years, and

1 ~~(D) any additional resources required by the Committee to~~
2 ~~adequately conduct its work.~~

3 ~~(b) Powers. The Committee shall have powers as described in this section~~
4 ~~and elsewhere in law. The Committee may take or cause depositions to be~~
5 ~~taken as needed in any investigation or hearing.~~

6 Sec. 3. FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE JOINT GOVERNMENT

7 OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

8 ~~The Joint Government Oversight and Accountability Committee shall~~
9 ~~include in its first annual report required by 2 V.S.A. § 972(a)(3) an analysis of~~
10 ~~whether the General Assembly should empower the Committee to issue~~
11 ~~subpoenas and administer oaths in connection with its examination and~~
12 ~~investigation of matters of government oversight and accountability related to~~
13 ~~issues of significant public concern. The Committee shall also include in its~~
14 ~~report a recommendation for whether the General Assembly should add a staff~~
15 ~~member dedicated to supporting the Committee in its work.~~

16 * * * Chief Performance Officer Annual Report * * *

17 Sec. 4. 3 V.S.A. § 2311 is amended to read:

18 § 2311. CHIEF PERFORMANCE OFFICER; ANNUAL STATE

19 OUTCOMES REPORT

20 * * *

21 ~~(c) Approving population-level indicators.~~

1 ~~(1) Annually, on or before March 1, a standing committee of the~~
2 General Assembly having jurisdiction over a population-level quality of life
3 outcome set forth in subsection (b) of this section or the Chief Performance
4 Officer may submit to the Joint Government Oversight and Accountability
5 Committee a request that any population-level indicator related to that
6 outcome be revised.

7 (2) If that request is approved by the Joint Government Oversight and
8 Accountability Committee, the Chief Performance Officer shall revise and
9 report on the population-level indicator in accordance with that approval and
10 this section.

11 (d) The report set forth in this section shall not be subject to the limitation
12 on the duration of agency reports set forth in 2 V.S.A. § 20(d).

13 * * * Auditor of Accounts Duties * * *

14 Sec. 5. 32 V.S.A. § 163 is amended to read:

15 § 163. DUTIES OF THE AUDITOR OF ACCOUNTS

16 In addition to any other duties prescribed by law, the Auditor of Accounts
17 shall:

18 * * *

19 (6)(A) Provide the Joint Government Oversight and Accountability
20 Committee with a written summary of all audits completed by the Office of the
21 Auditor of Accounts.

1 ~~(B) Upon the request of the Joint Government Oversight and~~
2 ~~Accountability Committee, provide, at the mutual convenience of the~~
3 ~~Committee and Auditor, a presentation to the Committee of any completed~~
4 ~~audit.~~

5 * * *

6 Sec. 6. ANNUAL AUDIT OF AGENCY PROGRAMS; PILOT

7 On or before November 15, in the years 2026, 2028, and 2030, the Auditor
8 of Accounts shall submit a written report to the Joint Government Oversight
9 and Accountability Committee concerning the periodic audit of administrative
10 programs operated by State agencies. The Auditor of Accounts shall select not
11 more than five programs to study during a given two-year reporting period and
12 shall examine the efficiency and outcomes of the selected programs, including
13 an analysis of the performance measures for each program and whether the
14 outcomes align with program objectives and goals.

15 * * * Periodic Reports * * *

16 Sec. 7. 2 V.S.A. § 20 is amended to read:

17 § 20. LIMITATION ON DISTRIBUTION AND DURATION OF AGENCY
18 REPORTS

19 (a) Unless otherwise provided by law, whenever it is required by statute,
20 rule, or otherwise that an agency, department, or other entity submit an annual,
21 biennial, or other periodic report to the General Assembly, that requirement

1 ~~shall be met by submission by January November 15 of copies of the report for~~
2 activities in the preceding fiscal year to the Clerk of the House, the Secretary
3 of the Senate, the Office of Legislative Counsel Operations, chairs of
4 legislative standing committees of jurisdiction, and such individual members
5 of the General Assembly or committees that specifically request a copy of the
6 report. ~~To the extent practicable, reports~~ Reports shall also be placed
7 published on the agency's ~~Internet~~ website. No general distribution or mailing
8 of such reports shall be made to members of the General Assembly.

9 * * *

10 (e) If it becomes apparent to any agency, department, or other entity
11 directed by the General Assembly to report on a matter that the agency,
12 department, or entity will be unable to do so within the required time, the
13 reporting agency, department, or entity shall inform, if applicable, the relevant
14 legislative committee's current chair, the committee assistant, and the Office of
15 Legislative Operations of which report will be late, why, and when it will be
16 delivered.

17 * * * Effective Date * * *

18 Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

19 ~~This act shall take effect on passage.~~

** * * Purpose and Findings * * **

Sec. 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this act is to advance the principle of government accountability by examining how evidence is used to inform policy, how State laws are implemented, and how legislation may be structured to achieve its intended outcomes. This act seeks to support consistent and transparent accountability practices through simple, clear, independent, objective, and fact-based processes.

** * * Pilot Government Accountability Project * * **

Sec. 2. PILOT GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

(a) Assignment. The Joint Fiscal Committee shall, in addition to its other duties described in law and rules, conduct the Pilot Government Accountability Project to examine governmental practices, make recommendations on improving those practices, and develop effective tools for evaluating government accountability.

(b) Selection of Project issues before the Committee. The Chief Fiscal Officer of the Joint Fiscal Office, in consultation with the Speaker of the House, and the President Pro Tempore, ~~and the leaders of the major political parties in both the House and the Senate,~~ will select issues for the Committee's consideration and refer these to the Joint Fiscal Committee on or before August 1, 2026.

(c) Charge. The Committee is charged with completing, to the extent feasible, Project elements as described in this section.

(1) Examination of issues selected by Committee. The Committee shall be empowered to examine, investigate, and otherwise analyze issues that it selects pursuant to subsection (b) of this section.

(2) Review of program performance. The Committee shall examine whether State programs and initiatives are advancing the policy goals established in statute, including consideration of outcome data, implementation progress, and operational challenges.

(3) Consideration of evidence and evaluation. The Committee shall review available research, independent evaluations, audits, and performance measures relevant to State programs and policies and encourage the use of reliable data and evaluation methods in legislative decision making.

(4) Identification of effective practices and improvement opportunities. The Committee shall highlight approaches that demonstrate positive outcomes, identify barriers to effective implementation, and recommend reasonable opportunities for improvement, coordination, or replication where appropriate.

(5) Support for alignment of policy, funding, and outcomes. The Committee shall provide information and recommendations that assist the General Assembly in aligning appropriations, statutory intent, and measurable results.

(6) Monitoring of follow-up actions. The Committee shall, when issuing recommendations, request updates from relevant agencies regarding actions taken or progress made, as appropriate.

(7) Coordination with existing oversight entities. The Committee shall work in consultation with legislative committees of jurisdiction, the State Auditor, the Chief Performance Officer, and other relevant entities to avoid duplication and to support efficient use of State resources.

(8) Surveying of data and data impact. The Committee shall survey available State data and documented impacts to better understand implementation, outcomes, and opportunities for improvement.

(9) Communication of outcomes. The Committee shall consider how and when program outcomes and performance information are communicated, including the audiences receiving such information and the clarity, timeliness, and usefulness of the communication for supporting transparency, public understanding, and informed decision making.

(10) Development of evaluation tools. The Committee may consider the development or use of appropriate tools and methods to assess program outcomes and performance, including measures that support consistent evaluation, transparency, and informed legislative and administrative decision making.

(d) Report. On or before December 15, 2026, and again on or before November 15, 2027, the Committee shall present and submit a written report to the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Government Operations that includes any findings on the issues examined and any recommendations for legislative action.

** * * Joint Fiscal Office Consultant; Appropriation * * **

~~Sec. 2. JOINT FISCAL OFFICE CONSULTANT, APPROPRIATION~~

~~(a) Committee personnel. The Joint Fiscal Office may, to conduct research and analysis and to provide other support as necessary for the Pilot Government Accountability Project, either:~~

~~(1) contract with a consultant for a two-year term; or~~

~~(2) create a new exempt temporary service position for a two-year term.~~

~~(b) Appropriation. There is appropriated to the Joint Fiscal Office from the General Fund in fiscal year 2027 the sum of \$150,000.00 for Pilot Government Accountability Project personnel.~~

Sec. 3. LEGISLATIVE JOINT FISCAL OFFICE CONSULTANT

(a) Committee personnel. The Legislative Joint Fiscal Office may, to conduct research and analysis and to provide other support as necessary for the Pilot Government Accountability Project, either:

(1) contract with a consultant for a two-year term; or

(2) create a new exempt limited service position for a two-year term.

(b) Appropriation. There is appropriated to the Legislative Joint Fiscal Office from the General Fund in fiscal year 2027 the sum of \$300,000.00, to be used for Pilot Government Accountability Project personnel over a two-year period.

** * * Effective Date * * **

Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.