

1 H.674

2 An act relating to the creation of the Vermont Sister State Program

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

4 Sec. 1. 3 V.S.A. § 2479 is added to read:

5 § 2479. VERMONT SISTER STATE PROGRAM

6 (a) Creation and purpose.

7 (1) The Vermont Sister State Program is created within the Agency of
8 Commerce and Community Development. The Agency shall provide support
9 to the Program and to the Sister State Program Committee as required.

10 (2) The purpose of the Program is to strengthen Vermont's international
11 engagement and to foster mutually beneficial relationships with national and
12 subnational governments abroad, with a goal of promoting cultural exchange,
13 economic development, and educational cooperation.

14 (b) Program oversight.

15 (1) The Sister State Program Committee, composed of the following
16 members, shall oversee the Program:

17 (A) the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development or
18 designee;

19 (B) a member of the House of Representatives, appointed by the
20 Speaker of the House;

21 (C) a member of the Senate, appointed by the Committee on
22 Committees;

1 (D) the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Vermont Council on
2 World Affairs or designee;

3 (E) the Vermont Adjutant General or designee;

4 (F) the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Vermont Arts Council
5 or designee; and

6 (G) three members, as follows:

7 (i) one member with expertise in cultural exchange or in Peace
8 Corps operations, appointed by the Governor;

9 (ii) one member representing a private institution of higher
10 education, appointed by the Committee on Committees; and

11 (iii) one member representing a public institution of higher
12 education, appointed by the Speaker.

13 (2) Members of the Committee shall serve two-year terms, provided that
14 members appointed pursuant to subdivision (1)(G) of this subsection shall
15 serve initial terms of three years each to establish staggered terms. Members
16 may be reappointed.

17 (3) The Committee shall elect a chair and vice chair from among its
18 members that shall each serve a two-year term.

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

1 (c) Meetings.

2 (1) All meetings shall be called by the Chair, but in the event that the
3 Committee does not have a chair, a meeting may be called by the Secretary of
4 Commerce and Community Development or designee.

5 (2) The Committee shall meet:

6 (A) at least once quarterly, for the purpose of:

7 (i) evaluating current Program agreements;

8 (ii) proposing new Program agreements;

9 (iii) preparing its annual report; or

10 (iv) discussing any other matter that the Committee deems
11 relevant to its work; and

12 (B) to review and score an eligible Program application not later than
13 30 days after the Committee receives the application from the Agency,
14 pursuant to subdivision (d)(3) of this section.

15 (d) Program application, review, and approval procedures.

16 (1) Development of application process. The Agency, in consultation
17 with the Committee, shall develop a process by which an entity can apply and
18 be considered for admission as a partner to the Program. This process shall
19 include the development of:

1 (A) an official application to be in the Program;

2 (B) a confidential internal review procedure to be used by the
3 Agency to review Program applicants for sensitive political, legal, ethical, and
4 strategic factors;

5 (C) minimum eligibility requirements to be considered for the
6 Program;

7 (D) a fixed-scoring system, including a rubric, to be uniformly
8 applied by the Committee to evaluate all eligible applications;

9 (E) a memorandum of understanding template to be used and signed
10 by the State and an approved Program partner that shall include a termination
11 date; and

12 (F) any other necessary Program parameters, including the length of
13 time for partner agreements to be in effect.

14 (2) Agency initial verification.

15 (A) When a Program application has been received by the Agency
16 pursuant to this section, the Agency shall, before the Committee may meet to
17 review the application:

18 (i) verify that the application meets the Program's minimum
19 eligibility requirements; and

20 (ii) conduct a confidential internal review of the applicant.

1 (B) Not later than 10 days after completion of the Agency's initial
2 verification and review of an application pursuant to subdivision (A) of this
3 subdivision (2), the Agency shall send the Committee a copy of the application
4 along with a summary of the Agency's analysis.

5 (C) The confidential internal review process conducted in subdivision
6 (A)(ii) of this subdivision (2), along with any and all documents reviewed
7 during that process, shall be exempt from public inspection and copying.

8 (3) Committee review and recommendation.

9 (A) The Committee, upon receiving an application that has received
10 preliminary approval from the Agency, shall meet to review the application
11 pursuant to subdivision (c)(2)(B) of this section not later than 30 days after
12 receipt of the application from the Agency.

13 (B) If the Committee recommends that an application reviewed
14 pursuant to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (3) be approved, the Committee
15 shall submit its recommendation to the Governor along with a copy of the
16 application not later than 30 days after completing its review of the application.

17 The Committee shall not send to the Governor an application that the
18 Committee does not recommend be approved.

19 (4) Governor's review.

20 (A) The Governor shall have the sole authority to issue final approval
21 or disapproval of a Sister State Program application that the Committee

1 recommended be approved. The Governor shall send written notice of the
2 Governor's decision to the Agency not later than 10 days after the Governor's
3 decision.

4 (B) If the Governor disapproves a Program application, the
5 Governor's notice in subdivision (A) of this subdivision (4) shall include a
6 written explanation of why the Governor did not follow the recommendation of
7 the Committee.

8 (C) Upon the Agency's receipt of the Governor's decision pursuant
9 to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (4), the Agency shall notify the applicant
10 of the Governor's decision not later than 30 days after the Agency receives
11 notice of the Governor's decision.

12 (D) If the application is approved by the Governor, the Agency shall
13 finalize a memorandum of understanding between the State and the Sister State
14 Program applicant.

15 (5) Termination. The Committee shall have the sole authority to
16 terminate an active Sister State Program partnership upon a majority vote of
17 Committee members at a Committee meeting.

18 (e) Reporting. The Committee shall submit an annual report not later than
19 January 15 of each year to the Governor and to the House Committee on
20 Commerce and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on

1 Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs that includes the
2 following:

3 (1) an executive summary of key development and outcomes of the
4 Program;

5 (2) a description of Committee activities, including a summary of
6 attendance and decisions at its meetings;

7 (3) updates on the Program, including an evaluation of sister state
8 applications, new partners, significant developments, metrics of success, and
9 challenges;

10 (4) a description of stakeholder engagement with the Program;

11 (5) a financial overview, including a summary of funding sources and
12 expenditures; and

13 (6) an outlook for the Program, which shall include strategic objectives,
14 potential new agreements, and growth opportunities for the next year.

15 (f) Compensation and reimbursement.

16 (1) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General
17 Assembly, a legislative member of the Committee serving in the member's
18 capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to per diem compensation and
19 reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than eight
20 meetings per year. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to
21 the General Assembly.

1 (2) detailed accounting from the State Treasurer’s office of the:

2 (A) administrative expenses that have been paid with funds raised by
3 the Commission, pursuant to subsection (g) of this section; and

4 (B) funds raised and donations, grants, and bequests received through
5 the Commission including the name, country of residence, and amount donated
6 of each contributor.

7 (g)(1) The Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission is authorized to raise funds,
8 through direct solicitation or other fundraising events, alone or with other
9 groups, and accept donations, grants, and bequests from individuals,
10 corporations, foundations, governmental agencies, and public and private
11 organizations and institutions, to defray the Commission’s administrative
12 expenses ~~and to carry out its purposes as set forth in this chapter.~~

13 (2) The funds, donations, grants, or bequests received pursuant to this
14 chapter subdivision (1) of this subsection shall be deposited in a bank account
15 and allocated annually by the State Treasurer’s office to defray the
16 Commission’s administrative expenses and carry out its purposes. Any monies
17 so withdrawn shall not be used for any purpose other than the payment of
18 administrative expenses under incurred pursuant to this chapter section and
19 shall be itemized and tracked for reporting purposes by the State Treasurer’s
20 office. Interest earned shall remain in the bank account. The State Treasurer

1 shall include the balance of the account in the annual reporting required
2 pursuant to subsection (f) of this section.

3 (3) For purposes of this section, “administrative expenses” does not
4 include any:

5 (A) expenses related to:

6 (i) campaign or election activity; or

7 (ii) food or beverages provided at official Commission meetings;

8 or

9 (B) other expense that is not specific to the administrative functions
10 of the Commission.

11 (h) Members of the Commission shall not receive any compensation or be
12 entitled to reimbursement of expenses by the State of Vermont or from the
13 fund managed by the State Treasurer pursuant to subsection (g) of this section
14 for their service on the Commission.

15 Sec. 2a. REPORT ON THE FUTURE OF THE VERMONT-IRELAND

16 TRADE COMMISSION

17 On or before December 1, 2029, the Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission
18 shall submit a written report to the House Committee on Commerce and
19 Economic Development and to the Senate Committee on Economic
20 Development, Housing and General Affairs with the following information:

1 (1) a summary of the accomplishments of the Commission since its
2 inception;

3 (2) a detailed analysis as to how the Commission has served its
4 legislative purposes pursuant to 9 V.S.A. § 4129(b); and

5 (3) an accounting on funds raised and details on gifts received pursuant
6 to 9 V.S.A. § 4129(g) since the Commission's inception.

7 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

8 This act shall take effect on passage.