

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;

1 (C) a member of the Senate, appointed by the Committee on
2 Committees;

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

5 (E) the Vermont Adjutant General or designee;

6 (F) the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Vermont Arts Council
7 or designee; and

8 (G) three members, as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

21 (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:

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 (2) Agency initial verification.

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

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

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

20 (B) Not later than 10 days after completion of the Agency's initial
21 verification and review of an application pursuant to subdivision (A) of this

1 subdivision (2), the Agency shall send the Committee a copy of the application
2 along with a summary of the Agency's analysis.

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

6 (3) Committee review and recommendation.

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

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

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

17 (4) Governor's review.

18 (A) The Governor shall have the sole authority to issue final approval
19 or disapproval of a Sister State Program application that the Committee
20 recommended be approved. The Governor shall send written notice of the

1 Governor's decision to the Agency not later than 10 days after the Governor's
2 decision.

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

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

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

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

17 (e) Reporting. The Committee shall submit an annual report not later than
18 January 15 of each year to the Governor and to the House Committee on
19 Commerce and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on
20 Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs that includes the
21 following:

1 (1) an executive summary of key development and outcomes of the

2 Program;

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

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

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

9 (5) a financial overview, including a summary of funding sources and
10 expenditures; and

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

13 (f) Compensation and reimbursement.

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

20 (2) Other members of the Committee shall be entitled to per diem
21 compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A.

1 § 1010 for not more than eight meetings per year. These payments shall be
2 made from monies appropriated to the Agency of Commerce and Community
3 Development.

4 Sec. 2. 9 V.S.A. chapter 111B is amended to read:

5 CHAPTER 111B. TRADE COMMISSIONS

6 § 4129. VERMONT-IRELAND TRADE COMMISSION

7 (a) The Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission is established within the State
8 Treasurer's office to advance bilateral trade and investment between Vermont
9 and Ireland. The Commission shall consist of ~~seven~~ nine members as follows:

- 10 (1) two members, appointed by the Governor;
- 11 (2) two members, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- 12 (3) two members, appointed by the Senate Committee on Committees;
- 13 and
- 14 (4) the State Treasurer or designee;
- 15 (5) the Commissioner of Economic Development or designee; and
- 16 (6) the President of the University of Vermont or designee.

17 * * *

18 (c) The members of the Commission, ~~except for the State Treasurer or~~
19 ~~designee,~~ appointed pursuant to subdivisions (a)(1)–(3) of this section:

- 20 (1) shall be appointed for terms of four years each and shall continue to
21 serve until their successors are appointed, except that in order to achieve

1 staggered terms, the two members appointed by the Governor shall serve initial
2 terms of two years each and the two members appointed by the Speaker of the
3 House shall serve initial terms of three years each;

4 ~~(2) Members may be reappointed; upon the expiration of the member's~~
5 ~~term;~~

6 ~~(3) A member serves~~ serve at the pleasure of the member's appointing
7 authority; ~~and~~

8 ~~(4) Not shall consist of not~~ more than two members ~~serving on the~~
9 ~~Commission may be members~~ of the General Assembly.

10 * * *

11 (f) The Commission, in coordination with the State Treasurer's office, shall
12 submit a written report with its findings, results, and recommendations to the
13 Governor and the General Assembly within one year ~~of~~ following its initial
14 organizational meeting and on or before December 1 of each succeeding year
15 for the activities of the current calendar year. The report shall also include a:

16 (1) disclosure listing any in-kind contributions received by specific
17 members of the Commission through their work in the Commission in the
18 current calendar year; and

19 (2) detailed accounting from the State Treasurer's office of the:

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

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

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

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

20 (3) For purposes of this section, "administrative expenses" does not
21 include any:

1 (A) expenses related to:

2 (i) campaign or election activity; or

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

4 or

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

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

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

12 TRADE COMMISSION

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

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

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

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

3 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

4 This act shall take effect on passage.