

1 H.674

2 Introduced by Representatives Graning of Jericho, Bosch of Clarendon, Carris

3 Duncan of Whitingham, Cooper of Pownal, Duke of

4 Burlington, Marcotte of Coventry, Micklus of Milton, Olson of

5 Starksboro, Priestley of Bradford, and White of Bethel

6 Referred to Committee on

7 Date:

8 Subject: Executive; Agency of Commerce and Community Development;

9 Sister State Program

10 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to create the

11 Vermont Sister State Program to be overseen by a Sister State Program

12 Committee. The Committee, with the assistance of the Agency of Commerce

13 and Community Development, will review applications and recommend to the

14 Governor whether an official sister state relationship should be formalized.

15 This bill also repeals the Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission.

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

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

2 ~~Sec. 1, 3 V.S.A., § 2479 is added to read:~~

3 § 2479. VERMONT SISTER STATE PROGRAM

4 (a) Creation and purpose.

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

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

12 (b) Program oversight.

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

15 (A) the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development or  
16 designee;

17 (B) a member of the House of Representatives, appointed by the  
18 Speaker of the House;

19 (C) a member of the Senate, appointed by the Committee on  
20 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.~~

20 ~~(C) Meetings.~~

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

4 (2) The Committee shall meet:

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

6 (i) evaluating current Program agreements;

7 (ii) proposing new Program agreements;

8 (iii) preparing its annual report; or

9 (iv) discussing any other matter that the Committee deems

10 relevant to its work; and

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

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

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

19 ~~(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; and

8 ~~(E) a memorandum of understanding template to be used and signed~~  
9 by the State and an approved Program partner.

10 (2) Agency initial verification.

11 ~~(A) When a Program application has been received by the Agency~~  
12 pursuant to this section, the Agency shall, before the Committee may meet to  
13 review the application:

14 ~~(i) verify that the application meets the Program's minimum~~  
15 eligibility requirements; and

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

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

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

5 (3) Committee review and recommendation.

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

10 (B) The Committee shall, not later than 30 days after completing its  
11 review of an application pursuant to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (3),  
12 submit its final recommendation to the Governor along with a copy of the  
13 application.

14 (C) The final recommendation pursuant to subdivision (B) of this  
15 subdivision (3) shall either be that the Committee recommends the application  
16 be approved or that the Committee recommends the application be  
17 disapproved.

18 (4) Governor's review.

19 (A) The Governor shall have the sole authority to issue final  
20 approval or disapproval of a Sister State Program application that the  
21 Committee recommended be approved. The Governor shall not review or

1 ~~approve of a Program application that the Committee recommended be~~  
2 disapproved. The Governor shall send written notice of the Governor's  
3 decision to the Agency not later than 10 days after the Governor's 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  
7 of 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  
14 State Program applicant.

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

20 (1) an executive summary of key development and outcomes of the  
21 Program,

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

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

6 (4) recommendations for new sister state agreements, along with the  
7 rationale for the recommendations and how they align with Vermont's strategic  
8 interests and capacity;

9 (5) a description of stakeholder engagement with the Program;

10 (6) a financial overview, including a summary of funding sources and  
11 expenditures; and

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

14 (f) Compensation and reimbursement.

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

1 ~~(2) Other members of the Committee shall be entitled to per diem~~  
2 ~~compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A.~~  
3 ~~§ 1010 for not more than eight meetings per year.~~

4 (3) Payments to members of the Committee authorized under this  
5 subsection shall be made from monies appropriated to the Agency of  
6 Commerce and Community Development.

7 Sec. 2. REPEAL

8 2025 Acts and Resolves No. 65, Secs. 4 (9 V.S.A. chapter 111B), 5 (initial  
9 appointment deadline for Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission), and 6 (repeal;  
10 Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission) are repealed.

11 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

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

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

*§ 2479. VERMONT SISTER STATE PROGRAM*

*(a) Creation and purpose.*

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

~~*(2) The purpose of the Program is to strengthen Vermont's international*~~  
~~*engagement and to foster mutually beneficial relationships with national and*~~  
~~*subnational governments abroad, with a goal of promoting cultural exchange,*~~

~~economic development, educational cooperation, and diplomatic  
collaboration.~~

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

*(b) Program oversight.*

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

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

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

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

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

*(E) the Vermont Adjutant General or designee;*

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

*(G) three members, as follows:*

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

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

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

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

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

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

(c) Meetings.

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

(2) The Committee shall meet:

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

(i) evaluating current Program agreements;

(ii) proposing new Program agreements;

(iii) preparing its annual report; or

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

~~(E) a memorandum of understanding template to be used and signed by the State and an approved Program partner.~~

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

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

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

(2) Agency initial verification.

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

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

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

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

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

(3) Committee review and recommendation.

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

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

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

(4) Governor's review.

(A) The Governor shall have the sole authority to issue final approval or disapproval of a Sister State Program application that the Committee recommended be approved. ~~The Governor shall not review or approve of a Program application that the Committee recommended be~~

~~disapproved.~~ The Governor shall send written notice of the Governor's decision to the Agency not later than 10 days after the Governor's decision.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

~~(f) Compensation and reimbursement~~

~~(1) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General Assembly, a legislative member of the Committee serving in the member's capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than eight meetings per year.~~

~~(2) Other members of the Committee shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 22 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than eight meetings per year.~~

~~(3) Payments to members of the Committee authorized under this subsection shall be made from monies appropriated to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.~~

(f) Compensation and reimbursement.

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

(2) Other members of the Committee shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than eight meetings per year. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

~~Sec. 2. REPEAL~~

~~2025 Acts and Resolves No. 65, Secs. 4 (9 V.S.A. chapter 111B), 5 (initial appointment deadline for Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission), and 6 (repeal; Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission) are repealed.~~

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

CHAPTER 111B. TRADE COMMISSIONS

§ 4129. VERMONT-IRELAND TRADE COMMISSION

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

- (1) two members, appointed by the Governor;*
- (2) two members, appointed by the Speaker of the House;*
- (3) two members, appointed by the Senate Committee on Committees;*

*and*

- (4) the State Treasurer or designee;*
- (5) the Commissioner of Economic Development or designee; and*
- (6) the President of the University of Vermont or designee.*

\* \* \*

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

*(1) shall be appointed for terms of four years each and shall continue to serve until their successors are appointed, except that in order to achieve staggered terms, the two members appointed by the Governor shall serve initial terms of two years each and the two members appointed by the Speaker of the House shall serve initial terms of three years each;*

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

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

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

\* \* \*

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

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

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

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

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

~~(g)(1) The Vermont-Ireland Trade Commission is authorized to raise funds, through direct solicitation or other fundraising events, alone or with other~~

*groups, and accept donations, grants, and bequests from individuals, corporations, foundations, governmental agencies, and public and private organizations and institutions, to defray the Commission's administrative expenses and to carry out its purposes as set forth in this chapter.*

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

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

*(A) expenses related to:*

*(i) campaign or election activity; or*

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

*or*

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

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

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

*TRADE COMMISSION*

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

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

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

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

*Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE*

This act shall take effect on passage.