

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

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

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

15 § 2479. VERMONT SISTER STATE PROGRAM

16 (a) Creation and purpose.

17 (1) The Vermont Sister State Program is created within the Agency of

18 Commerce and Community Development. The Agency shall provide support

19 to the Program and to the Sister State Program Committee as required.

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

5 (b) Program oversight.

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

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

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

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

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

16 (E) the Vermont Adjutant General or designee;

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

19 (G) three members, as follows:

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

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

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

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

12 (c) Meetings.

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

16 (2) The Committee shall meet:

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

18 (i) evaluating current Sister State Program agreements;

19 (ii) proposing new Sister State Program agreements;

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

3 (2) Agency initial verification.

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

7 (i) verify that the application meets the Program's minimum
8 eligibility requirements; and
9 (ii) conduct a confidential internal review of the applicant.

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

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

17 (3) Committee review and recommendation.

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

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

5 (C) The final recommendation pursuant to subdivision (B) of this
6 subdivision (3) shall either be that the Committee recommends the application
7 be approved or that the Committee recommends the application be
8 disapproved.

9 (4) Governor's review.

10 (A) The Governor shall have the sole authority to issue final approval
11 or disapproval of a Sister State Program application that the Committee
12 recommended be approved. The Governor shall not review or approve of a
13 Program application that the Committee recommended be disapproved. The
14 Governor shall send written notice of the Governor's decision to the Agency
15 not later than 10 days after the Governor's decision.

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

20 (C) Upon the Agency's receipt of the Governor's decision pursuant
21 to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (4), the Agency shall notify the applicant

1 of the Governor's decision not later than 30 days after the Agency receives
2 notice of the Governor's decision.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 (5) a description of stakeholder engagement with the Program;
2 (6) a financial overview, including a summary of funding sources and
3 expenditures; and
4 (7) an outlook for the Program, which shall include strategic objectives,
5 potential new agreements, and growth opportunities for the next year.

6 (f) Compensation and reimbursement.

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

12 (2) Other members of the Committee shall be entitled to per diem
13 compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A.
14 § 1010 for not more than eight meetings per year.

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

18 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

19 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.