

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Human Services to which was referred Senate Bill No.
3 239 entitled “An act relating to the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting
4 Working Group” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and
5 recommends that the House propose to the Senate that the bill be amended by
6 striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the
7 following:

8 Sec. 1. CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT REPORTING WORKING
9 GROUP; REPORT

10 (a) The General Assembly finds:

11 (1) According to Child Trends, a research organization focused on
12 improving the lives of children, youth, and families, data shows that from 2022
13 through 2024 Vermont had a rate of referrals to child welfare services that was
14 over three times higher than the national level, with a rate of referral of 166 per
15 1,000 children in Vermont compared to 50 per 1,000 children nationally.
16 Additionally, only 17 percent of such referrals in Vermont met the criteria for
17 further action via an assessment or investigation compared to 54 percent
18 nationally.

19 (2) While the General Assembly recently reviewed and revised child
20 abuse and neglect substantiation procedures that occur after a referral has been
21 accepted by the Department for Children and Families, there has not been a

1 similar review of the training and requirements for mandatory reporting of
2 suspected child abuse or neglect to ensure they employ best practices and
3 provide sufficient guidance and resources for mandatory reporters.

4 (3) Data from Child Trends further shows that post-response services
5 such as mental health services, substance misuse treatment, family therapy,
6 child care, parenting education, and resources to assist families living in
7 poverty were provided to only 28 percent of victims in Vermont compared
8 with the national average of 57 percent.

9 (4) The provision of services to children and families prior to, during,
10 and after a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is an essential element in
11 a comprehensive child protection system.

12 (b) There is created the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Working
13 Group for the purpose of examining the existing statutes and the Department
14 for Children and Families’ rules and policies regarding mandatory reporting of
15 abuse and neglect of a child and recommending changes to modernize them
16 and reflect current best practices. During its examination of mandatory
17 reporting, the Working Group shall consider what services and strategies may
18 be employed prior to any report of suspected abuse or neglect for the purpose
19 of providing assistance to families before a situation rises to the level of
20 requiring a report.

21 (c) The Working Group shall be composed of the following members:

- 1 (1) a member with lived experience as an abused or neglected child,
2 appointed by the Vermont Child, Youth, and Family **Advisory** Council;
- 3 (2) a member with lived experience as an individual who was reported
4 for suspected child abuse or neglect and an investigation found the report to be
5 unsubstantiated, appointed by the Vermont Parent Representation Center;
- 6 (3) the Vermont Child, Youth, and Family Advocate or Deputy
7 Advocate;
- 8 (4) the **Supervising Attorney, Juvenile Division, Office of the Defender**
9 **General or designee;**
- 10 (5) the Executive Director of the Vermont Center for Crime Victim
11 Services or designee;
- 12 (6) a co-executive director of the Vermont Network Against Domestic
13 and Sexual Violence or designee;
- 14 (7) a member from the Department for Children and Families' Family
15 Services Division, appointed by the Deputy Commissioner of the Division;
- 16 (8) the Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse Vermont or designee;
- 17 (9) the Director of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network or
18 designee;
- 19 (10) a certified law enforcement officer who has served on a special
20 investigative unit, appointed by the Vermont Law Enforcement Advisory
21 Board;

- 1 (11) a physician co-chair of the Vermont Citizen’s Advisory Board;
2 (12) a principal, appointed by the Vermont Principals’ Association; and
3 (13) a representative of a designated agency that works in children’s
4 mental health, appointed by Vermont Care Partners.

5 (d) In conducting its work, the Working Group shall consult with
6 stakeholders, including:

7 (1) Vermont Children’s Alliance and representation from Child
8 Advocacy Centers;

9 (2) the Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs;

10 (3) KidSafe Collaborative;

11 (4) Voices for Vermont’s Children;

12 (5) Vermont Parent Representation Center;

13 (6) Disability Rights Vermont;

14 (7) medical partners, such as the University of Vermont’s Child Safe

15 Program;

16 (8) the Vermont Office of Racial Equity;

17 (9) the Office of the Attorney General; and

18 (10) a school counselor appointed by the Vermont School Counselor
19 Association.

20 (e) On or before April 1, 2027, the Working Group shall provide an interim
21 presentation to the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate

1 Committee on Health and Welfare, and the House and Senate Committees on
2 Judiciary on its work to date. On or before October 1, 2027, the Working
3 Group shall provide a final report detailing its findings and any recommended
4 legislative proposals to the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate
5 Committee on Health and Welfare, and the House and Senate Committees on
6 Judiciary.

7 (f)(1) In developing its recommendations, the Working Group shall
8 prioritize issues related to:

9 (A) providing clarity regarding statutory definitions applicable to
10 mandatory reporters;

11 (B) establishing consistency between statutory requirements and
12 Department for Children and Families rules, guidance, and training materials;

13 (C) identifying practical implementation challenges faced by
14 mandatory reporters in complying with existing law;

15 (D) assessing the appropriateness and efficacy of provisions in
16 33 V.S.A. §§ 4912 and 4913 regarding the definitions applicable to mandatory
17 reporters, who should be a mandatory reporter, the process for mandatory
18 reporting, the penalties for failure to report, and any exemptions from the
19 reporting requirement; and

20 (E) identifying alternatives to reporting suspected child abuse or
21 neglect when such alternatives are in the best interests of the child.

1 (2) The Working Group shall avoid expanding its review into matters
2 unrelated to mandatory reporting obligations, thresholds, or processes unless
3 necessary to resolve an identified reporting issue.

4 (3) Any recommendations shall remain consistent with federal
5 requirements under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA),
6 which establishes minimum standards related to state definitions of abuse and
7 neglect, including physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse or exploitation, and
8 emotional maltreatment.

9 (4) To promote efficiency and avoid duplicative work, the Working
10 Group shall leverage the work of the Children’s Justice Act Task Force and the
11 Vermont Citizen’s Advisory Board (VCAB), which serves as Vermont’s
12 CAPTA citizen review panel.

13 (5) The Working Group shall consider best practices from other states in
14 the development of its recommendations.

15 (g) The Working Group shall have the administrative, technical, and legal
16 assistance of the Department for Children and Families.

17 (1) The Working Group shall convene its first meeting on or before
18 August 15, 2026.

19 (2) The Working Group shall elect a chair at its first meeting.

20 (3) Members of the Working Group who are not otherwise compensated
21 for their attendance at meetings shall be entitled to per diem compensation and

1 reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more
2 than 12 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to
3 the Department for Children and Families.

4 (4) The Department for Children and Families shall post information
5 about the Working Group’s efforts on its website, including meeting notices,
6 agendas, procedures for public comment, and minutes of meetings.

7 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

8 This act shall take effect on passage.

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17 (Committee vote: _____)

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Representative _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE