



Date: April 16, 2026

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs

From: Susan Evans McClure, Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council

Re: H.674 An act relating to the creation of the Vermont Sister State Program

Good morning, my name is Susan Evans McClure and I'm the Director of the Vermont Arts Council. I'm here as a member of the Sister State working group, and speaking in favor of H.674 and the creation of a Vermont Sister State program.

When it comes to opportunities to support international arts and culture opportunities, there is nothing but benefit through a Sister State program for Vermont and for Vermont artists.

As we all know, learning about and connecting to other countries helps us see that there is a broader world out there of talented people that we can connect with and learn from. And when that learning and connection takes place through the arts, it's just incredible.

I had the happy opportunity to be part of the Sister State working group, which met over the past 2 years to develop a program that will work for Vermont. You may not hear this often, but it really was a wonderful working group to be part of- the ACCD team did a great job managing the committee, and everyone brought their skills, expertise, and a willingness to learn. We had the opportunity to hear from other states that have similar programs, and we focused on creating something realistic, responsible, and impactful. Our recommendations for the program lean into effective public/private partnerships in a meaningful way, and the process and outcome was well thought through.

There's also important attention to detail to ensure that our Sister State program is aligned with national regulations on international engagement. The final report included an internal review process, and I thought it would be specifically interesting to this committee to note that we recommend the process include a comprehensive check against federal and international sanctions lists, specifically including the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) Sanctions List, and State Department Sanctions and Restricted Entity Lists. When it comes to economic development, the Sister State working group believed it was vital for our partners to be upholding the values that we support in our own democracy and economy.

Vermont has already benefited so much from artists moving here from other countries- we have incredible Vermont art inspired by the experiences of artists who moved here from Afghanistan through the [Arts Lords group in Brattleboro](#). One of Vermont's most talented performers, KeruBo's, work is based in African traditional music of her home country of Kenya. A2VT, who performed at Farmers Night a few years back, showcase their native African music and dance roots with Western pop and hip hop. I could really just go on and on listing talented people. And all of these artists are Vermont artists because they are living here and creating work here. International opportunities only strengthen Vermont's cultural landscape.

I'll also mention the importance of sister states to the Vermont Youth Orchestra Association. VYOA tours the orchestra every 3-4 years, and their very first tour in 1990 was an exchange to Urislav. They've had conversations with Totori, Japan, and the orchestra has played for the Totori delegation when they have visited. The sister states are a great start to these partnerships, and it's also important to mention that VYOA and their students and families are paying for these experiences.

The program potentially has the opportunity to benefit tourism- people from sister states visiting Vermont. A research study published in the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management in 2020 reported that tourism can significantly and directly benefit from sister regional programs, if the programs focus on that as an outcome.

Other states have really dug into the higher education opportunities- for example the College of Charleston, in South Carolina, actually has a sister state scholarship program, where they offer half off tuition to students from South Carolina's sister states. So there is room to explore opportunities as this moves forward.

The Vermont Arts Council fully supports this effort and looks forward to being part of the process as the Program is created. I'm happy to take questions and look forward to seeing a Sister State program happen in Vermont.