

S.159

Introduced by Senators Hardy, Clarkson, Norris, Vyhovsky, Watson and

White

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Municipal and county government; structure of county governance

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to create a study committee that shall examine how to best strengthen county-level government in Vermont to enhance and optimize public safety, tax collection, and resource allocation.

An act relating to the County Governance Study Committee

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

Sec. 1. COUNTY GOVERNANCE; STUDY COMMITTEE; REPORT

(a) Creation. There is created the County Governance Study Committee to enhance and optimize public safety; regional collaboration and planning; efficient, equitable, and transparent public resource allocation; and effective regional public services for individuals and municipalities.

(b) Membership. The Committee shall be composed of the following members:

1 (1) two current members of the House of Representatives, the first of
2 which shall be the Chair of the House Committee on Government Operations
3 and Military Affairs, and the second of which shall be from a different political
4 party and appointed by the Speaker of the House;

5 (2) two current members of the Senate, the first of which shall be the
6 Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, and the second of
7 which shall be from a different political party and appointed by the Committee
8 on Committees;

9 (3) two members, appointed by the Department of State's Attorneys and
10 Sheriffs, the first of which shall be a current sheriff, and the second shall be a
11 current State's Attorney;

12 (4) one member of a postsecondary educational institution located in
13 Vermont who has expertise in state and local government, appointed by the
14 Secretary of State;

15 (5) one member, appointed by the Vermont Association of County
16 Judges;

17 (6) one member, appointed by the Vermont Association of Planning and
18 Development Agencies;

19 (7) one member, appointed by the Vermont Bond Bank;

20 (8) one member, appointed by the Vermont Municipal Clerks' and
21 Treasurers' Association;

1 (9) one member, appointed by the Vermont League of Cities and
2 Towns; and

3 (10) one member of the Vermont Regional Development Corporations,
4 appointed by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development.

5 (c) Powers and duties. The Committee shall study and make
6 recommendations to the General Assembly on how to improve the structure
7 and organization of county government, including the following items:

8 (1) enhancement and optimization of public safety;

9 (2) enhancement of regional collaboration and planning;

10 (3) efficient, equitable, and transparent allocation of public resources;

11 (4) promotion of effective regional public services for individuals and
12 municipalities;

13 (5) clarification of the role and oversight of elected county officials and
14 their departments;

15 (6) reduction of duplicated municipal services;

16 (7) balance of availability and cost of services across municipalities in
17 each county; and

18 (8) review of county government structures in other states.

19 (d) Assistance. The Committee shall have the administrative, technical,
20 and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the Office of
21 Legislative Counsel, and the Joint Fiscal Office.

1 (e) Report. On or before November 1, 2025, the Committee shall report to
2 the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the
3 Senate Committee on Government Operations with its findings and any
4 recommendations for legislative action.

5 (f) Meetings.

6 (1) A Committee member from the House of Representatives appointed
7 by the Speaker of the House shall call the first meeting of the Committee to
8 occur on or before September 1, 2024.

9 (2) The Committee shall be co-chaired by the Chair of the House
10 Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Chair of
11 the Senate Committee on Government Operations.

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

13 (4) The Committee shall cease to exist on July 1, 2026.

14 (g) 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
19 10 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the
20 General Assembly.

1 (2) Other members of the Committee who are not paid for their services
2 by the organization that the member is representing on the Committee shall be
3 entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted
4 under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 10 meetings. These payments shall
5 be made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

6 (h) Appropriation for Committee consulting. The sum of \$50,000.00 is
7 appropriated to the Committee from the General Fund in fiscal year 2025 to
8 contract with one or more consultants to assist with research, preparation of the
9 report, and any other assistance with the Committee's work deemed necessary
10 by the Committee.

11 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

12 This act shall take effect on passage.