

### August Committee Meeting #4

Facilitator: Commissioners Mia Schultz and Melody Mackin

AGENDA		
3:00 pm	Language Accessibility	Mia
5 min	Land Acknowledgement	Melody
2 min	Attendance -place name, pronouns, where from and organization you are representing in the chat - optional unless speaking during the meeting. Share email addresses with us if you want periodic emails and updates.	Mia
3 min	Working Pledge	Melody
30 min	Welcome and introductions PROMPT	Mia
2 min	Administrative Updates	Ann
Old Business		
5 min	Accessibility Protocol Part II	Melody
3 min	Virtual and In-Person Events - Safety Protocol	Melody
8 min	Outreach	Mia
5 Minute Break		
New Business		
50 min	Strategic Plan Summary	
	Strategic Plan	
	Statement Taking Plan	
	Report Plan	
10 min	Committee Members Update -Update us on your community news	
	Public comments -limit of 2 minutes per person	
5:00 pm	Adjourn	

All meeting materials, when available, can be found on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission webpage <https://vtrc.vermont.gov>.

Meetings will be transcribed, and minutes will be posted in a timely manner.

To request language translation, including American Sign Language, please contact us at [VTRC@vermont.gov](mailto:VTRC@vermont.gov). Please contact us 72 hours in advance if you need these services for meetings.



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## Vermont Truth and Reconciliation (VTRC) Strategic Plan Summary

### Mission

We exist in a pursuit of community-centered, justice and holistic healing centered on impacted ACT 128 communities, which include per §902

- Individuals who identify as Native American or Indigenous;
- Individuals with physical, psychiatric, or mental conditions or disability, and the families of individuals with the physical, psychiatric or mental health condition or disability;
- Black individuals and other individuals of color;
- Individuals with French Canadian, French- Indian or other mixed ethnic or racial heritage;
- Other populations and communities at the discretion of the Commissioners.

We seek collective liberation from violence and discrimination systemically perpetrated by the state of Vermont. We do this by uplifting community voices through storytelling, researching, and community relationships, and make legislative recommendations.

### Vision

#### Who is A Vermonter?

In Vermont, some people think that only those with old New England family ties are “real Vermonters.” This idea comes from past practices like the eugenics movement, which unfairly targeted certain groups. The Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission (VTRC) wants to change this view. It believes everyone should decide for themselves if they are a Vermonter, helping to build a community where everyone can succeed.

#### Impacted Communities

The VTRC looks at how state laws and policies have treated different communities unfairly. In its first year, the Commission found that these communities have lost important things, like their spiritual and cultural identity, community connections, health, land, resources,

and freedom to move around. By understanding these losses, the VTRC wants to find common experiences and help rebuild community connections for those affected.

### **Truth-telling for the Future**

One of the main goals of the Commission is to uplift the truths of affected communities. The VTRC encourages Vermonters to listen with an open mind. These truths will be powerful and sometimes hard to hear, like treating people as less than human, misuse of power, and unfairness. By sharing these experiences, Vermont can recognize the harm done and make a plan to fix it. Healing is necessary for everyone.

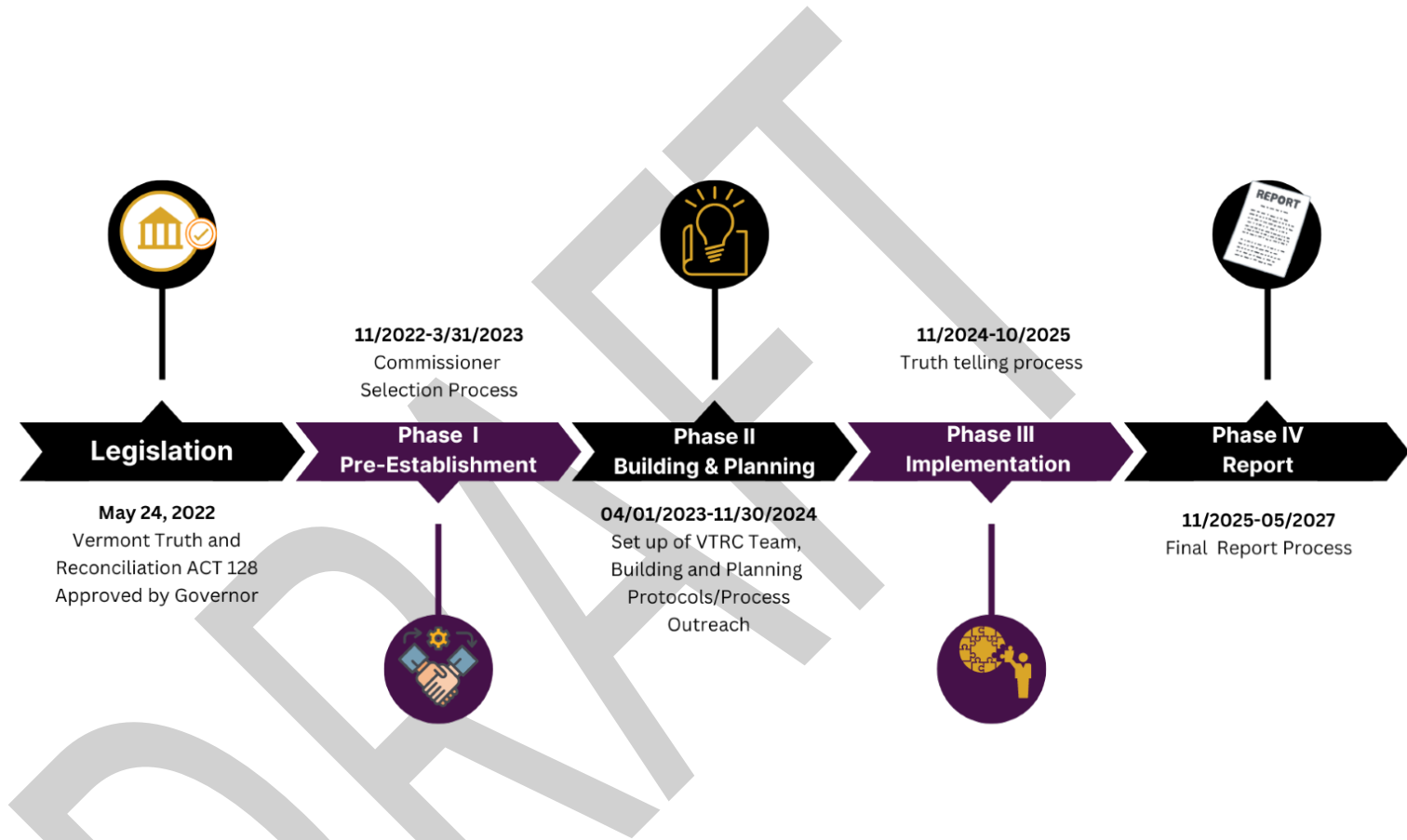
### **Research**

The VTRC is determined to create a shared memory that more accurately reflects the diverse histories of Vermont's communities. Some celebrate Vermont's achievements, while others remember the pain of stolen land, forced sterilization, and discrimination. The VTRC will collaborate with families affected by these injustices to ensure that their voices are heard. By gathering personal truths and conducting thorough research, the VTRC aims to reveal how past wrongs shape the present and propose ways to heal.

### **Legal**

The VTRC knows that laws and social movements have helped reduce discrimination, but there are still problems that stop people from fully participating in society. The VTRC legal team wants to understand the policies and laws that have caused differences in wealth, health problems, and loss of community and identity over generations. The VTRC aims to help create new laws and fix current ones to make sure everyone has the rights to life, freedom, happiness, and safety, as promised by the Vermont Constitution.

### **Timeline**



\*This document is a plain language summary of the full Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission (VTRC) Strategic Plan. It is intended to provide an accessible overview of the key points and objectives outlined in the complete Strategic Plan. For more detailed information, please refer to the full document.

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## Community Letter

Dear Community,

We invite you on this journey with the Vermont Truth & Reconciliation Commission (VTRC) to create a new roadmap for the future of Vermont. This journey must be fueled with intention and care. This Strategic Plan is more than a document. It is a vision for realizing a future of new possibilities.

This Commission has been tasked to look at how discrimination has been built into Vermont's laws and policies, both past and present, and its impact on the most vulnerable communities in Vermont. The Commission has been mandated to document institutional, structural, and systemic discrimination in Vermont and identify potential actions that can be taken by the state to repair the damage caused by this harm. The Commission's recommendations will center healing and hopefully prevent the recurrence of such discrimination in the future.<sup>1</sup>

Tackling this work with intentionality has weighed upon our hearts and minds. The majority of truth and reconciliation processes that have been established worldwide were scaled to a specific group of people, a time-period, and atrocity. Vermont is setting a historical precedent by being all-encompassing, which presents opportunities and challenges. Our approach is grounded with purpose and meaning in every decision. It has to be. We keep those who have come before us, ourselves, and our future generations in mind. We thought about the meanings of truth and of reconciliation. We wanted to make sure truths were honored for those who have not been uplifted in the past. Even the word reconciliation was debated. Was there ever a good relationship between the state of Vermont and the ACT 128 communities? Reconciliation involves restoring harmony between parties and conciliation focuses on resolving conflicts and bringing people together. Ultimately, we will provide a report to the state, and we hope that government officials will decide to implement their own accountability process.

The process for creating the framework of this strategy began with an exploration of identity as outlined in the mandate. Human identity and relationships intersect with many types of communities, experiences, and ancestors. Identities and relationships change over time, and the human experience has many beautiful iterations. Separating the mandate by identities was too limiting, because identities are not experienced in isolation. Dr. Kimberlee Crenshaw, the person who coined the term "intersectionality" reminds us, "If we aren't intersectional, some of us, the most vulnerable, are going to fall through the cracks."<sup>2</sup> The impact of intersectionality cannot be understated. Eli Clare, Vermont activist, writer, educator, and speaker, said, "How do we make the space to talk honestly and wrenchingly about all the multi-layered systems of injustice that

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<sup>1</sup> Act No. 128 (H.96). Discrimination; Truth and Reconciliation Commission An act relating to creating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "On Intersectionality: Essential Writings," in *Faculty Books*. (New York: The New Press, 2017), 255. <https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/books/255>

target some of us and privilege others for who we are? The layers are so tangled: gender folds into disability, disability wraps around class, class strains against race, race snarls into sexuality, sexuality hangs onto gender, all of it finally piling into our bodies...How do we dig down to find, not uncrackable, unmovable rhetoric, but the concrete daily material, emotional, and spiritual realities of privilege and oppression on this planet rife with injustice....”<sup>3</sup>

As identity was too narrow, we focused attention on institutions and systems. For example, we considered framing the work through healthcare, education, criminal justice, and housing. There are many examples of oppressive laws and policies that have both historically and presently affected the communities of this mandate. We realized that that focus too was flawed—many truths intersect with multiple systems. As Audre Lorde, intersectional feminist, poet, and civil rights activist, explained, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”<sup>4</sup>

Once again, we revised our focus. Ultimately, we arrived at the beginning of this mandate, which arose from an apology for the state’s participation in the eugenics movement. Vermont’s acknowledgement and apology for its role in this appalling chapter of its history were important steps forward. Yet, the apology felt insufficient in addressing profound and enduring harm inflicted on individuals and families. Thus, the idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was born out of recognition that deeper, more meaningful action is needed. With this in mind, this Commission would like you to co-create the blueprint for a better Vermont by sharing your truths and your calls to action.


Thank you for being part of our journey to realize this Strategic Plan.

In unity and collaboration,

Mia Schultz, Commissioner

Melody Mackin, Commissioner

## Background and Situation Analysis

When Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, murdered George Floyd in 2020, it began a long-overdue reckoning with the legacy and persistence of racism in the United States. This period involved the Vermont Department of Health declaring racism as a public health 

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<sup>3</sup> Eli Clare, *Digging Deep: Thinking about Privilege*, Eli Clare, Jan 24-26, 2003, <https://eliclare.com/lecture-digging-deep-thinking-about-privilege/>

<sup>4</sup> Audre Lord, “Learning from the 60s”, in *Sister Outsider*, (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 138.

emergency and aimed to draw attention and actions to massive racial disparities in health outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Multiple organizations in the U.S., both private and public, issued statements and declarations that promised they would work tirelessly to address systemic racism in the U.S. by paying close attention to hiring and employment practices. A massive governmental investment in grants and programs to support diversity, equity, and inclusion, combined with massive federal infusions of funding that sought to address health disparities related to COVID-19 provided a historical opportunity to reorient American society so that the country could collectively work to address systemic inequality, oppression, and discrimination. This political environment provided space for the state of Vermont to consider its own history and to commit to holistic and sustained actions that could address these issues.

In 2022 the Vermont Legislature publicly apologized for the Legislature's support of the eugenics movement in Vermont.<sup>6</sup> This movement, which was able to take hold in an environment of prejudice and discrimination, culminated in doctors sterilizing Vermonters, placing hundreds of children and adults in institutions consistently plagued by abuses, and a broad campaign that taught eugenics as a scientific fact in schools, universities, and adult education groups.<sup>7</sup> The state removed children from their homes, drove people from many targeted communities into hiding, traumatized countless people in need, and ended familial lines.

The main goal of the eugenics movement in Vermont was to promote procreation and success among white, cisgender, heterosexual, Protestant, wealthy, Anglo-Vermonters and segregate and stop the procreation of all others who were considered inferior. This was done under the assumption that the former population was biologically superior and that latter populations were biologically inferior and marked by deficiency, degeneracy, and delinquency. Eugenics has its roots in racial pseudoscience from anthropology and biology that emerged in the late 1800s. This pseudoscience reduced cultural belonging and identity to biology and quantified that belonging through false ideas about "blood," producing contemporary ideas that linger today, such as blood quantum.<sup>8</sup>

Eugenics advocates in Vermont and around the world used terms like "feeble-minded" and "defective" to justify institutionalization, segregation, and sterilization of people they saw as undesirable.<sup>9</sup> Eugenicians thought of these labels as scientific and medical. But in reality, they applied

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<sup>5</sup> Vermont State Legislature. 2021. Act 113 No. R-113 Joint resolution relating to racism as a public health emergency (J.R.H.6). [ACTR113 As Adopted.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Vermont State Legislature. 2021. Act 114 No. R-114. "Joint Resolution Sincerely Apologizing and Expressing Sorrow and Regret to All Individual Vermonters and Their Families and Descendants Who Were Harmed as a Result of State-Sanctioned Eugenics Policies and Practices." [ACTR114 As Adopted.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Holly Allen and Erin Fuller, "Beyond the Feeble Mind: Foregrounding the Personhood of Inmates with Significant Intellectual Disabilities in the Era of Institutionalization," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 36 (2) (Spring 2016). [Beyond the Feeble Mind: Foregrounding the Personhood of Inmates with Significant Intellectual Disabilities in the Era of Institutionalization | Disability Studies Quarterly \(dsq-sds.org\)](#); Mercedes de Guardiola, "Vermont for the Vermonters": *The History of Eugenics in the Green Mountain State*, (Barre, Vermont: Historical Society 2023); Nancy Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> National Public Radio, "So What Exactly is 'Blood Quantum'?", interviewee Elizabeth Rule and interviewer Kat Chow, 2018, [So What Exactly Is 'Blood Quantum'? : Code Switch : NPR](#);

<sup>9</sup> Allen and Fuller, "Beyond the Feeble Mind."



these terms so inconsistently and broadly that any person who did not fit their idea of what a “true” Vermonter was, could be labeled as “defective.” People labeled as such were separated from their family, friends, and community, and then sent to state institutions rife with abuses.

The Vermont eugenics movement’s effects are still felt today in disparities in health outcomes, rates of incarceration and institutionalization, quality of life, housing access, and educational opportunities, among many other areas. The language of eugenics is still present in popular-media and healthcare discourses. There is no neat “end” to eugenics in Vermont or anywhere else in the world. Likewise, there is no neat “beginning” to eugenics.

Apologies, such as the one that the legislature issued, are only substantive when followed by actions. In this spirit, the state legislature created the VTRC. The VTRC is designed to be an entity that is independent and autonomous from state government. The legislature has charged the VTRC with a substantial mission – to dismantle systemic discrimination and oppression that have resulted from state laws and policies. This charge stretches far beyond the eugenics movement and will reveal the root causes of the injustices that it is tasked with addressing.

The current disparities in incarceration, health outcomes, education, institutionalization, housing access, and the right to safely that exist in society did not emerge in a vacuum, just as eugenics did not emerge in a vacuum. The 1793 Constitution of the State Vermont, which followed the 1777 Constitution of the Vermont Republic, is a product of its time. Much of the legislative, philosophical, and cultural framework that informed the Constitution came from Elizabethan England and neighboring New England states that were likewise informed by Elizabethan law and norms.<sup>10</sup>

The Elizabethan Era involved substantial colonization that displaced, murdered, and erased the existence of uncountable Indigenous peoples in the Americas. This century marked the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, displacing, murdering, and erasing the identities and cultures of millions of people from Sub-Saharan Africa. It entailed widespread persecution of Catholics in England.<sup>11</sup> Jews could not legally live in England during this time.<sup>12</sup> Elizabethan policies treated impoverished and disabled people punitively and provided few rights for average citizens.<sup>13</sup> Having such a system as the basis of law and rights raises serious questions about how this framework can be an adequate means of securing and perpetuating the rights of people living today.

When people speak of Vermont today, they may emphasize the state’s progressive nature both in the present and past, pointing to, for instance, the fact that Vermont was the earliest state to adopt anti-slavery policies. However, this law has been severely mischaracterized. Enslavement was still legal for men and boys under the age of 21 and women and girls under the age of 18.<sup>14</sup> The law did not provide enforcement

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<sup>10</sup> Lorenzo D’Agostino, *The History of Public Welfare in Vermont*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948).

<sup>11</sup> Rafael Tarrago, “Bloody Bess: The Persecution of Catholics in Elizabethan England.” *Logos: A Journal of Thought and Culture* 7 (1) (2004): 117-133.

<sup>12</sup> Cynthia Seton-Rogers, “The Exceptions to the Rule: Jews in Shakespeare’s England,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, 51 (2) (2018): 6-12.

<sup>13</sup> D’Agostino, *The History of Public Welfare in Vermont*.

<sup>14</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont, 1777-1810: Essay and Primary Sources*, (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2014).

mechanisms to penalize people living in Vermont who enslaved human beings; treating Africans and their descendants as property and not as people who deserved rights or legal protections.

Likewise, the Constitution of the State of Vermont only provided men with the right to vote, denying others the right to Legislative representation and a democratic voice. It was based upon Europeans' and their descendants' assumed-right to land in a continent they had never visited, and it involved a refusal to acknowledge the rights of Indigenous peoples who have called Vermont home since time immemorial. It treated impoverished and disabled people severely by seriously limiting their rights and segregating them from the rest of society.<sup>15</sup> It did not protect the rights of all those living in Vermont.

This is the philosophical, moral, and legislative environment, from which the eugenics movement emerged. This is the environment that has contributed toward and facilitated contemporary prejudices, such as transphobia, racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism, among countless other forms of discrimination and hatred. This is what the VTRC is tasked with dismantling.

Vermonters have asked, as does the VTRC, how can there be reconciliation if there has never been conciliation, much less acknowledgment, of many of these injustices? One of the most chilling aspects of the eugenics movement and the drafting of the Constitution of the State of Vermont is that the people behind them imagined themselves as champions of rights and wrote of their efforts as improving society.

This begs perhaps the most morally essential questions that faces humanity—what hardship and cruelty do we perpetuate, despite our best intentions? What violence has society normalized to the point that we do not view it as violence? Whose voices do we ignore and disregard, no matter how anguished they become?

The VTRC will never be able to entirely dismantle all systems of oppression and discrimination, and certainly it will not be able to do so in a prescribed and limited amount of time. The VTRC can only hope to begin a statewide dialogue that deeply reckons with the state's history and seriously considers the future that we are leaving for our descendants and to begin a deeply needed process of healing. The VTRC cannot enforce its recommendations and cannot singlehandedly implement the changes in education, culture, and consciousness that can rectify these injustices and prevent them from reoccurring. **The VTRC's work will ultimately only have meaning if the Legislators and the general public give our work meaning. A true process of truth and reconciliation involves a society that is animated by a desire to know our neighbors and to ensure that all who live here can live a dignified life, filled with opportunity and acceptance.**

Since its creation, the VTRC has engaged extensively with the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to shape and focus its mission, vision, and goals. The ICTJ has been instrumental in the creation of the VTRC and Act 128, including providing the Legislature with essential input

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<sup>15</sup> D'Agostino, *The History of Public Welfare in Vermont*.

on how to create and operationalize truth and reconciliation commissions. Ongoing conversations with multiple individuals and organizations across Vermont have helped the VTRC gain a better understanding of what the public expects and how to organize efforts.

## Mission

The VTRC wrote a mission to crystallize its purpose. From the moment the Commissioners were appointed, four questions became guiding tenets of the VTRC: Who are we? What do we want? Who do we serve? What are we willing to sacrifice?

While reflecting on these imperative questions, the VTRC received guidance from Dr. Roz Whitaker-Heck, who provided a framework called murmuration— “remarkable ability to maintain cohesion as a group in highly uncertain environments and with limited, noisy information.”<sup>3</sup> VTRC has been applying murmuration as a mindset.

The Commission researched the missions of truth & reconciliation commissions all over the world. The VTRC developed a first version and brought it to the public. The following is the first version:

The Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission exists in a pursuit of community-centered justice and holistic healing centered on impacted intergenerational Act 128 communities. We seek collective liberation from institutional, systemic, violence and racism by uplifting community voices through storytelling, researching and community relationships.

After a month of input from the public both in our public meeting space and via email, the final version of the mission statement was created:

**We exist in a pursuit of community-centered, justice and holistic healing centered on impacted ACT 128 communities, which include per §902 (b)**

- Individuals who identify as Native American or Indigenous;
- Individuals with physical, psychiatric, or mental conditions or disability, and the families of individuals with the physical, psychiatric or mental health condition or disability;
- Black individuals and other individuals of color;
- Individuals with French Canadian, French- Indian or other mixed ethnic or racial heritage;
- Other populations and communities at the discretion of the Commissioners.

**We seek collective liberation from violence and discrimination systemically perpetrated by the state of Vermont. We do this by uplifting community voices through storytelling, researching, and community relationships, and make legislative recommendations.**

## Vision

Truth and reconciliation are ultimately an exercise of the heart, in which the voices of the unheard are uplifted through truth-telling. This is not meant to be performative; it is meant to be healing and a beginning to transformation for all parties. The VTRC fits within a global movement that includes commissions from South Africa, Germany, Liberia, Solomon Islands, to South Korea, and yet, its mandate allows for a one-of-a-kind adaptation. Each place features different worldviews and people that may even have different definitions of truth and reconciliation. The VTRC understands that reconciliation is an individual process and that a blanket apology will not be sufficient. The VTRC would like to create space for truth-telling and for each individual to be in control of what an apology looks like for them.

## The Olive Branch

The logo is part of the intentional design of the VTRC's work. Created by Thea Heck, it features an olive branch in gold with ten leaves facing downward and oppositely arranged. The leaves remain as pairs. The VTRC is bolded in purple. While researching the olive branch, and doing so with a variety of sources, the VTRC learned that the olive branch is prominently featured in many cultures, especially from the Mediterranean region, Asia, and Africa where it originates. Among some of these cultures, the olive branch symbolizes wisdom, hope, fertility, power, health, balance, the source of light, and it is sacred symbol in some religious traditions. Colonists to Turtle Island, later named the Americas, brought the olive tree with them and all of the cultural symbolism associated with it. The practice of settler colonialism, including the genocide of Native peoples, the creation of the institution of slavery, the social construction of race, and ableism were only possible through adherence to the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery erased the sacred symbols related to the olive branch and replaced them with colonization and dehumanization of those they encountered and forced into servitude.<sup>16</sup> The VTRC rejects the Doctrine of Discovery and recognizes the humanity of all human beings, past and present, especially those who have never been acknowledged as human. The VTRC reclaims the olive tree's original symbolism.

Conventionally, the expression to “extend the olive branch” indicates that a gesture of reconciliation or peace has been offered. Once everyone, individually, has reclaimed their own humanity, they can truly recognize and acknowledge the humanity of others. Through the reclamation of ourselves as human beings and the understanding of our place within creation and the community of human and non-human relatives, we can finally obliterate the systems of oppression that keep us down. Collective liberation is possible if we can think outside of the systems that have been handed to us. As Aboriginal rights activists in Queensland, Australia say, “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Joshua Mark, “Doctrine of Discovery,” World History, October 11, 2023, [www.worldhistory.org/Doctrine\\_of\\_Discovery/#google\\_vignette](http://www.worldhistory.org/Doctrine_of_Discovery/#google_vignette).

<sup>17</sup> Aboriginal Activists Group Queensland, 1970s. “Let Us Work Together,” Uniting.Church, [“Let us Work Together” – Uniting Church Australia](http://Uniting.Church).

The Vermont Constitution begins by stating that “all persons are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent, and unalienable rights.<sup>18</sup>” Those rights include: “enjoying and defending life and liberty, acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing happiness and safety.” Have these provisions been afforded in their entirety to all within the borders of Vermont or only to a very narrow group of people since the creation of Vermont? There is a perception and bias of who is a real Vermonter. As the olive branch became a symbol of colonization, the VTRC would like to extend it back. This is an invitation for society to hold itself accountable and uphold its own values for ALL people that live within this part of Mother Earth. Vermont has an opportunity to make the olive branch once again symbolize wisdom, hope, health, balance, and all of the other beautiful traditions so that all Vermonters can live fulfilling, happy, and healthy lives and without fear.

## Who is a “Vermonter?”

During the writing of this plan, one of the commissioners took a break and visited the local store. It was a bit of a chilly morning at the beginning of spring and the attendant commented on the weather, per the usual custom. They laughed and said, “I’m not sure of your background but I’m used to this. I’m a real Vermonter and go back generations.” This is a very common sentiment shared throughout Vermont, “Who is a ‘real’ Vermonter?” It has seeped into the cultural fabric of this place, so much so that a morning chat about the weather inevitably led to the question. The impact of how it is framed is by nature exclusionary. The Native Vermont stickers seen around the state do not denote one as being either Mohican or Abenaki, rather they refer to this idea of the old Vermont stock. Nancy Gallagher studied the Eugenics Survey of Vermont and wrote of this practice, “The Eugenics Survey of Vermont and the Vermont Commission on Country Life emerged as a focal point for confronting the racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance beneath the mythical portrayals of Vermonters as a ‘hardy race’ descended from the old New England Protestant stocks.<sup>19</sup>”

In shaping the common memory of this place, it is essential to place Vermont in context. The origin story of this land that is now called Vermont begins billions of years ago and includes continental shifts, non-human relatives of many varieties that have come and gone, and the human inhabitants that came to call this land home. The original peoples of this place incorporate the land itself as a part of their own creation story and understand that they are the land, and the land is them. Vermont is situated within the homeland of the Abenaki and Mohican people. The political, social, and cultural history of this place began long before Vermont's founding, which is but one very small part of its history.

Who is a “real” Vermonter then? The cultural norm commonly spoken of refers to a very select group of people. The old New England Protestant stock that consumed much of the Mohican and Alnobak, commonly known as Western Abenaki, homeland were the only people seen as the actual community of this place. Furthermore, the constitutional provision to outlaw slavery was limited and did not erase that system of dehumanization for people under a certain age nor deter those who continued to participate or benefit economically. Since the formation of Vermont, there has always been an “other”. The symptoms of this sentiment can be seen in the history of enslavement, the history of

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<sup>18</sup> The Vermont General Assembly, *Constitution of the State of Vermont*, [Constitution of the State of Vermont | Vermont General Assembly | Vermont Legislature](#).

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters*, (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1999), 7.

discrimination against the disability community, the history of institutions, eugenics laws, and presently in the mentality that allows discrimination to proliferate. Complicity and ignorance allow all of those systems to thrive. The idea of the degenerate family that springs up during the eugenics survey is the name created for those othered. It is imperative to consider the ways in which ableism was used to create the language of degeneracy as well as the systems to support that movement. According to the Burlington Free Press in their piece on the proposed eugenics apology, “In a farewell address to the Vermont Legislature in 1912, Gov. John Mead called for a "eugenic solution" to the problem of “our degenerates,” marking a defining moment for the eugenics movement in Vermont. Noted in a journal article from the Vermont Historical Society, “it was the first time a state official had publicly proposed eugenics as an answer to a growing number of perceived social crises.”<sup>20</sup>” The question, “Who is a real Vermonter?”, has roots that precede eugenics, but the sentiment of othering also gave rise to it.

It is critical to reshape the collective memory and perception of who qualifies as a "Vermonter" and who is entitled to the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and promised by the state. The gap between the lived experience of the old Protestant stock versus everyone else is often immensely different. The prevailing narrative asserts a hierarchical understanding of who deserves these rights, perpetuating exclusion and marginalization. As long as the conception of who belongs to Vermont remains narrow and limited, violence will persist against particular groups deemed non-Vermonters. The work of the VTRC seeks to challenge and broaden this limited perspective so that everyone that makes a home here can be included in the community.

The VTRC contends that every person defines for themselves whether they are a Vermonter, and no person or entity shall determine that for them. Robin Kimmerer wrote in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, “All flourishing is mutual.”<sup>21</sup>

## Impacted Communities

During the conceptualization process of the VTRC, Representative Tom Stevens stated, “We’re trying to build something that represents the beginning of a longer conversation between those of us who are part of the systems and the people that we’re needing to listen to during this process.”<sup>22</sup> His statement is in direct alignment with those considered Vermonters and those who have been impacted by discrimination. During

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<sup>20</sup> Ethan Bakuli, “Official apology for eugenics program move ahead in Vermont legislature,” *Burlington Free Press*, April 1, 2021, [Official apology for VT eugenics program moves ahead in VT Legislature \(burlingtonfreepress.com\)](https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/news/official-apology-for-vt-eugenics-program-moves-ahead-in-vt-legislature/)

<sup>21</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> David Goodman, “Vermont Conversation: Does Vermont Need a Truth Commission?”, *VT Digger*, March 6, 2022, [Vermont Conversation: Does Vermont need a Truth Commission? - VTDigger](https://www.vtdigger.com/2022/03/06/vermont-conversation-does-vermont-need-a-truth-commission/)

the advocacy of creating a truth and reconciliation commission he said, “In order for us to reckon as an institution, as a system that did the oppression, we need to hear from people, and they need to feel like they can tell their stories.”<sup>23</sup>

As a result of this vision, the VTRC is tasked with scrutinizing the discrimination perpetuated by the state through its laws and policies. Lawmakers were careful to choose specific identities with the historical and generational memory of discrimination and marginalization.

In the first year of the Commission, emblematic case meetings were held where discrimination was defined as: “The treatment or consideration of people differently based on their group, class, or category, rather than on individual merit.” Within the context of truth and reconciliation, the term “discrimination” alone does not capture the specific damages experienced by the various groups named in the mandate.

To address this, the VTRC began to explore what has been lost historically, presently and over generations of discrimination. By reviewing the emblematic cases, holding commissioner discussions with the groups listed in the mandate, and pursuing targeted research, the Commission was able to identify the tangible and intangible losses these communities have endured.

Here is a beginning assessment of what has been lost:

## 1. Spiritual and Cultural Identity

- Language and Communication

- Cultural and Traditional Heritage

- Religion and Spiritual Practices

- Identity and Self-worth

- Artistic and Creative Expression

- Recognition and Honor

- Joy and Quality of Life

## 2. Community and Relationships

- Social Connections and Belonging

- Childhood and Family

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<sup>23</sup> Calvin Culter, “VT Lawmakers Move Forward to Establish Reconciliation Commission,” WCAX3, South Burlington, VT, WCAX TV, January 11, 2023.

Visibility and Representation

Political and Legal Representation

Credibility and Trust

### 3. Health and Well-being

Health and Mental Health

Personal Safety and Freedom

Life

Reproductive Autonomy

Dignity and Respect

### 4. Land and Resources

Land and Property

Economic Opportunities and Wealth

Access to Services and Technology

Public Accommodations

### 5. Mobility and Access

Educational Opportunities

Employment and Career

Transportation and Mobility

The damages that accompany loss occurred to each of the impacted communities of people that the VTRC has been charged to care for and uplift. They sometimes show up differently. Due to the framework of dominant culture, these communities have often been pitted against each other and even within each group. Lateral violence is a direct result of intentional division. The beauty of the VTRC's scope is that people can share what has been lost to find commonality and reinvigorate community amongst each other.



## Apologies

The VTRC was created out of an apology by the state of Vermont for its legalization of eugenics, also known as forced sterilization of human beings. The apology was not enough.<sup>24</sup> Many governments around the world have used apologies as a pathway toward redemption. That said, there are problems with apologies. For example, if people have lost access to their own language and culture, how will that ever be recovered again? Apologies will never be enough. While healing can come from a true sincere apology, the VTRC is hoping to impart healing for future generations, which is not possible without action. A sincere apology must remove the blame that the victim holds and rightly places that upon the perpetrator. Originally, the VTRC framed the question, “What does Vermont owe you an apology for?” Consistent feedback from impacted community members as well as documentation from other reconciliation processes was clear; apologies are not effective and sometimes feel insincere to the impacted community who often experience generations of violence that may persist into the present.

The VTRC has a responsibility to find ways to prevent apologies from being actionless.

Each generation, no matter where they come from — whether they are born into poverty or with wealth, whether they are of European or African descent or Native to this place — make concerted efforts to break cycles of trauma. Most people do not want their children, grandchildren, nieces, or nephews to suffer or endure pain or trauma. People who have endured generations of violence, theft, and erasure do pass trauma down from generation to generation because the system continually perpetuates it through laws and policies. What is enough to break cycles of oppression and trauma? The VTRC will ask what justice and healing might look like to each person so that these calls to action can help form the final report to the state of Vermont. The VTRC would like to call in impacted communities to tell their truths, reveal what has been lost in their lives and in their ancestors’ lives, and inform a pathway toward a future without intentional barriers or loss.

## Truth Telling for the Future

The VTRC is here to listen.

Per the VTRC mission, one of the main goals of the Commission is to uplift the truths of impacted communities. In order to make reconciliation a reality and more than just a ten-thousand-foot view of what CAN be, Vermonters must pay attention and do so with curiosity. They must listen to the truths of the people and hold them sacred without judgment and they must suspend disbelief. The truths of the unheard and oppressed will

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<sup>24</sup>“More Than Words: Apologies as a Form of Reparation,” ICTJ.org, December 28, 2015, [More Than Words: Apologies as a Form of Reparation | International Center for Transitional Justice \(ictj.org\)](#); [Should a nation apologise for the crimes of its past? \(theconversation.com\)](#); [Reparations | OHCHR](#)

be unsettling, uncomfortable, powerful, numerous, and will form a new memory of experiencing times and places. They will be anecdotes of what it means to be human. We will all grow, if we are willing to listen.

Some of the themes that emerged from the public during the VTRC's Emblematic Case meetings include dehumanization of people, abuse of power, lack of accountability, inadequate inclusive policies, bias, and harsh punishment. Only those who have survived and the descendants of impacted people can tell us where to begin. It is an entitlement to expect people to tell their truths and relive what could be some of the worst experiences of their lives or the lives of their ancestors without offering something in return. Their truths will be a pathway toward the acknowledgement of harm and to create a blueprint for action.

Though the VTRC is uplifting the voices of Act 128 communities, both those who are the perpetrators of violence and those who are impacted by violence need to heal. Therefore, the VTRC will invite the systems and structures that caused harm to acknowledge the violence done and begin their own process of reconciliation. Desmond Tutu helps us reflect on this by stating, "True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness which is costly. Forgiveness in turn depends on repentance, which has to be based on an acknowledgment of what was done wrong, and therefore on disclosure of the truth. You cannot forgive what you do not know."<sup>25</sup>

## Research

The stalk of the olive branch serves as a poignant symbol, reflecting the collective memory that the VTRC aims to cultivate through this process. As Georges Erasmus, a Dene leader, eloquently stated in the context of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created." Vermont, community's memories are varied and complex. Some recall narratives of Progressivism, liberalism, and the state's idyllic landscapes, intertwined with tales of Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys, alongside milestones, like being the first U.S. state to abolish slavery, to introduce civil unions on July 1, 2000, and to introduce same-sex marriage by enacting a statute without being required to do so by a court decision. Conversely, others bear memories of stolen land, indentured servitude, continued slavery, forced sterilization, hate crimes, the haunting legacies of the Ku Klux Klan and sundown towns. Through rigorous historic and ethnographic research and the integration of truths by impacted communities, both past and present, the VTRC aims to establish a shared memory that acknowledges the full spectrum of Vermont's history.

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<sup>25</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "Statement by Archbishop Desmond Tutu on His Appointment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," Justice.Gov.Za, November 30, 1995, [PR - 30 Nov 95 - STATEMENT BY ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU ON HIS APPOINTMENT TO THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION \(justice.gov.za\)](https://www.justice.gov.za/pr/1995/30nov95-statement-by-archbishop-desmond-tutu-on-his-appointment-to-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission).

<sup>26</sup> Georges Erasmus, "Preface." in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, prepared by Castellano, Marlene Brant, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagne, xiii. (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).

The VTRC will ask how the present view of history came to be and whose perspectives have been excluded. The Commission will work closely with several families that are linked by oppressive and discriminatory systems throughout the history of Vermont. By collaboratively working with these families, the VTRC will work to build a shared memory that includes the voices of the people that have been dismissed and dehumanized. This will allow Vermont to build a consciousness that is more inclusive, and by extension, more truthful. Drawing inspiration from decolonial research methods, the VTRC will work intentionally, respectfully, and cooperatively to help restore and uplift the dignity of families. The VTRC recognizes the families as research partners, not research subjects. They are the experts on their lives and have deeply held knowledge of the harm that the state has inflicted on them. The families will provide the VTRC with suggestions about the way the state could atone for its actions and the type of legislative remedies that can prevent the violence.

Themes that emerge from statements collected from the impacted communities outlined in Act 128 will be integrated into the final report. By integrating first-hand accounts, the VTRC aims to reveal the enduring patterns that connect historical injustices to contemporary realities. Finally, this research will highlight opportunities for familial healing, root cause analysis, and legislative reform that will ensure these acts of violence do not continue in the present or happen again in the future.

## Legal

Building upon the progress made through historical, legal frameworks, and social movements, the VTRC recognizes the ongoing gaps in the pursuit to abolish discrimination in institutions and systems. The VTRC acknowledges the efforts made by the U.S. and Vermont to correct legal frameworks and to address discrimination through measures, such as disability and civil rights legislation as well as anti-discrimination laws. The VTRC also recognizes the creation of agencies, boards, and commissions that have been created to address the gaps in the federal laws. Yet, the work remains because the injury continues.

The VTRC must learn about and understand the laws and policies in the present and the past that inflict/inflicted harm to so many. The Commission will share what it has learned with the Vermont Legislators and with Vermont citizens so that we address the impacts together. Some of the impacts include stolen generational wealth, identities hidden in order to survive, parents who faced discrimination and children who were robbed of their innocence and thrust into institutions, poor farms, or adopted into unfamiliar families without community, belonging, and care. These are the types of harms that do not go away in a generation or even three.

As the VTRC address the legal institutions, structures and systems, it asks the following questions:

- How can the laws, policies, and people acting on behalf of the state of Vermont help address these injustices, acknowledge the harm, and support communities moving forward?
- What laws, policies or other guidance could stop current discrimination or prevent new iterations of discrimination by the state?
- What laws and policies can bring closure and healing to families today, by providing access to the information about their ancestors? This information includes how they died, the forms of suffering they endured, and where they were buried?

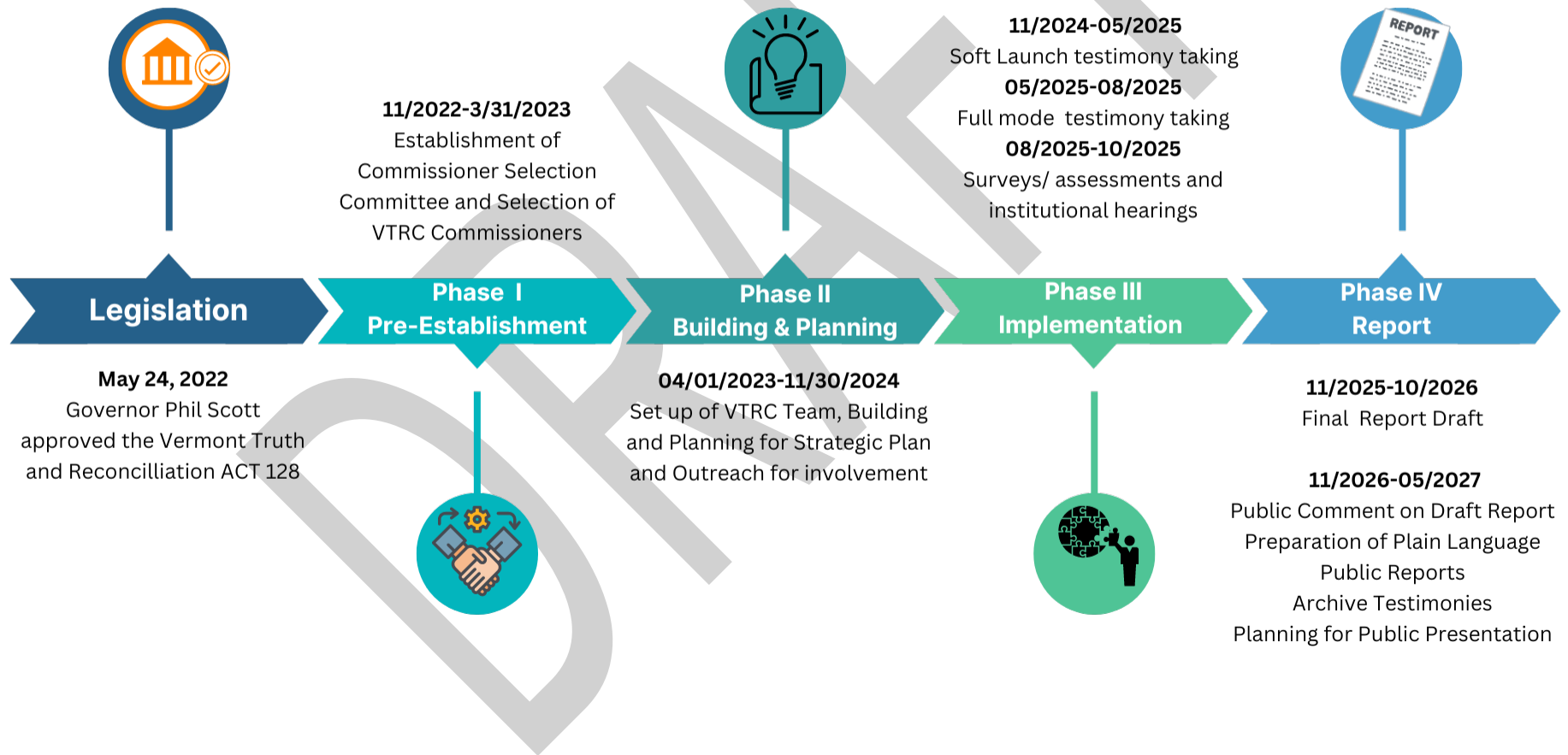
The legal system was created with the idea that individuals have rights to life, liberty, pursuit of happiness and safety. The VTRC is in pursuit of ensuring that all people are guaranteed these rights. To accomplish this, the voices of the impacted should not only be heard but their experiences uplifted to shape a new way of creating and evaluating laws. Justice Thurgood Marshall saw that it is not enough to have the right words in a constitution or in laws and in caselaw. Society needs to make sure that justice can emerge and shine in tandem with the realities of society. In Marshall's own words:

“We cannot play ostrich. Democracy just cannot flourish amid fear. Liberty cannot bloom amid hate. Justice cannot take root amid rage. America must get to work. In the chill climate in which we live, we must go against the prevailing wind. We must dissent from the indifference. We must dissent from apathy. We must dissent from fear, hatred and mistrust. We must dissent from a nation that has buried its head in the sand, waiting in vain for the needs of its poor, its elderly, and its sick to disappear and just blow away. We must dissent from a government that has left its young without jobs, education or hope. We must dissent from the poverty of vision and the absence of moral leadership. We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do better.<sup>27</sup>”

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<sup>27</sup> Justice Thurgood Marshall, “The Liberty Medal Acceptance Speech,” Genius.Com, July 4, 1992, [Thurgood Marshall – The Liberty Medal Acceptance Speech | Genius.](#)

# Timeline



# Phases

## Phase I - Pre Establishment

During the Pre-Establishment Phase 1 of the VTRC, the Commission was formed. A bill was introduced into the legislation in January 2021.<sup>28</sup> The groundwork began during the legislative sessions in 2022 at the Vermont State House where the H.96 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Development Task Force convened to lay the groundwork for this transformative endeavor. The legislative calendar was punctuated by the efforts of representatives like Kevin Christie, Harold "Hal" Colston, Thomas Stevens, and a host of additional sponsors who championed the cause. On May 24, 2022, Governor Phil Scott signed the bill, and it became Act 128.

In November 2022, the VTRC Commissioner Selection Panel began the process of seeking candidates for commissioners pursuant to § 904 and § 905. The panel members include the following individuals: Vanessa Santos Eugenio, Co-Chair, Karen Tronsgard-Scott, Co-Chair, Nina Ridhibinyo, Judith Chalmer, N. Bruce Duthu, Etan Nasreddin-Longo, Jennifer Morton-Dow. In April 2023, three commissioners were chosen and introduced to the public. The chosen commissioners were: Melody Mackin, M.A.; Mia Schultz; and Patrick Standen, M.A.

## Phase II – Building and Planning

The Commissioners began their work on March 31, 2023, with a public introduction. The beginning of the building and planning phase of the newly-established commission included commissioner onboarding. The Commissioners completed state employee orientation, ordered office equipment, and set up the personnel system.

Staff recruitment and hiring were a significant undertaking and involved identification of roles and responsibilities for potential staff as outlined in Act 128—an executive director, lead researcher, administrative assistant, and legal counsel. Commissioners created job descriptions and worked closely with Human Resources to post job opportunities. Commissioners set up and conducted interviews and hired Faith Yacubian (executive director), Ann Miller (administrative assistant), Adam Kersch (lead researcher), and Michele Olvera (legal counsel).

A significant amount of time from the beginning of the building and planning phase went into research for the operational foundation. This included the context of the truth and reconciliation movement internationally and nationally so that the VTRC could create a local adaptation tailored to Vermont. Through the guidance of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Commissioners set up consultations with truth and reconciliation officers from across the world to build a foundation for the Commission's process. The Commissioners created working agreements; established relationships with various agencies and stakeholders across the state; set-up a remote office structure; created the website; set up administrative policies; created a public meeting structure; and learned how to work within the Vermont State System.

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<sup>28</sup> Introduced by Representatives Christie of Hartford, Colston of Winooski, Stevens of Waterbury, Cina of Burlington, Copeland Hanzas of Bradford, LaClair of Barre Town, LaLonde of South Burlington, Lippert of Hinesburg, Long of Newfane, and Redmond of Essex

Outreach is a significant part of commissioner duties. During the building and planning phase, the Commissioners conceptualized and created an Outreach Plan. The Commissioners began building relationships within communities; met with organizations virtually and in person; attended public events; created events to engage the public; and engaged in in-person outreach. Part of outreach, and the mandate itself, includes fundraising for the additional money required to complete VTRC's work. During the building and planning phase, a strategy for fundraising was developed to ensure that the work is fully funded and not completed with a scarcity lens. Part of this strategy is to appeal to the institutions and organizations that have benefited and/or contributed to discrimination. The VTRC refers to these organizations as "Reconciliation Partners". Though they are not legally compelled to be part of this process, they could be viewed as having a responsibility to be part of this process.

The strategic plan includes the mission, vision, and action plans. Within the action plan are tasks that incorporate methodology, truth-telling tools, messaging and communications, fundraising, rules, and protocols. While conceptualizing the strategic plan, the VTRC orchestrated an emblematic case process.

\*Protocols and strategies will be posted to the VTRC website <https://vtrc.vermont.gov/> following their approval at a public meeting.

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#### [VTRC Research & Data Protocols](#)

\* [Outreach Strategy](#) Internal only –shared all or in part with VTRC and subcommittee however public can find in the meeting minutes

\* [Fundraising Strategy](#) Internal only –shared all or in part with VTRC and subcommittee however public can find in the meeting minutes

\*  [Safety Protocols](#)

\* [Care Protocol](#)

\* [Confidentiality Protocols](#)

\* [Accessibility Plan](#)

\*Implementation Committee plan

[Statement Taking Action Plan](#)

Report Action Plan

\*Building and Planning Committee to Review Drafts and Inform the Final

### Phase III - Implementation Phase

This phase is about listening and features a comprehensive and inclusive approach to gathering statements from impacted community members listed in Act 128. This plan recognizes the diverse needs and circumstances of the participants by offering multiple ways to engage. Through in-person, public truth-telling sessions, both virtual and in-person, as well as individual and group sessions, this process accommodates various accessibility needs and ensures that those who wish to be confidential are included. Furthermore, the methods in which the VTRC receives statements are broad and include verbal statements, video, written and artistic expression. Restorative practices and trauma-informed services are paramount to the success of these sessions and are infused to support victims throughout the process.

Representatives of institutions and contributing systems that have benefited and perpetuated discrimination are invited to participate in the truth-telling process. These sessions are separate from the impacted communities. This open-dialogue and engagement aims to facilitate meaningful reflection, cultural humility, and empathy to foster the understanding that discrimination impacts all Vermonters.

The initial 11-member committee established during the building and planning phase, guides the committee structure used during implementation. The committee members' insights and expertise ensure that the approach is adaptive, accessible, and responsive to community needs.

Historical, ethnographic, and legal research continues throughout implementation, and inform and are informed by the truth-telling sessions.

\*Protocols and strategies will be posted to the VTRC website <https://vtrc.vermont.gov/> following their approval at a public meeting.

Statement Taking...

**ANN: PLACE STATEMENT TAKING ACTION PLAN and REPORT and FINAL ACTION PLAN HERE**

No need to add the following to the booklet:

- \*Statement Taking Action Plan
- \*Victim support Process
- \*Care Protocol
- \*Research Methodology
- \*Guiding Prompts for Truth-Telling



\*Statement taker guide

\*Building and Planning Committee to Review Drafts and Inform the Final

#### Phase IV – Report Phase

The phase showcases multiple approaches, including the official legislative report with recommendations, a historical anthology, a plain language version for the public, and a final presentation. Beginning with the official legislative report, the VTRC is mandated to complete a draft report six months prior to final submission, at which time the public will have the opportunity to offer comments and potential revisions. This report will include recommendations of new laws or revisions to current laws and policies for the legislative body to consider. The report will also feature educational reform recommendations for potential programs, activities, and actions to repair harm and educate the public about disparities experienced by affected communities. The report will hopefully catalyze change at the legislative level and lay the foundation for continuation of truth telling and acknowledgement of harm.

As a gift to the Act 128 impacted community members and the Vermont community, the VTRC intends to include three additional ways to understand the impact of this meaningful time in history. This is a historic process and the VTRC is committed to ensuring all Vermonters have engaging ways to interact with this process. These include:

- Historical anthology to compile the research and truth telling
- Plain language and summary version for the public
- Final presentation to visualize the findings and celebrate this work.

\*Report Final Action Plan

\*Implementation Committee (TBD) to review draft and inform final

## Conclusion

This is a community-centered endeavor. Let us seek truth, justice, and healing together - FOR each other.

To join us, go to the VTRC's website <https://vtrc.vermont.gov/> to learn how to "Get Involved". VTRC is excited to partner with you!

## Addendum

\*Additional documents, such as the budget, will be posted to the VTRC website <https://vtrc.vermont.gov/> following their approval at a public meeting.

## Hyperlinks

### Phase I

[Vermont State House - H.96 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Development Task Force 2/3/2022](#)

[Vermont State House - H.96 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Development Task Force 2/22/2022](#)

[Vermont State House - H.96 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Development Task Force 2/24/2021](#)

[Vermont State House - H.96 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Development Task Force 3/11/2021](#)

[Legislative Calendar](#)

[VTRC Selection Panel Final Report | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

### Phase II

[VTRC Interim Report – January 12, 2024.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)

[Home | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

[Mission Statement and Pledge | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

[Emblematic Cases | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

[Meet the VTRC Team | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

[Committee Members | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

[ICTJ Papers | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

[Meetings | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

[Press Release | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

## Acknowledgements

The VTRC extends its deepest gratitude to the many organizations, groups, and individuals who have guided or otherwise contributed to the VTRC's Strategic Plan (Building and Planning Phase II).

- Alanna Ojibwe
- AJ Reuben
- Bob Watts
- [Building and Planning Committee Members](#)
- California Truth and Healing Council: Christina Snider Ashtari, Tribal Affairs Secretary & Loretta Miranda, Deputy Tribal Affairs Secretary
- Chief Willie Littlechild
- Dr. Rosalynne Whitacker-Heck
- Eli Clare
- Emblematic Case Review Participants
- Farah Tanis
- Honorable Murray Sinclair
- The Hub
- ICTJ: Elena Naughton, Emma Merritt-Cuneo, Virginie Ladisch
- John Moody
- Judy Dow
- Margaret Bass
- Memria - Louis Bickford
- Mark Charles
- Mercedes de Guardiola
- Patrick Standen
- Réjean Obomsawin

- Reverend Mark Hughes
- Sandy White Hawk
- Seetal Sunga
- State Representatives: Elizabeth Burrows, Kevin “Coach” Christie, Anne Donahue, Tom Stevens, Tiff Bluemle
- Thea Heck
- Vermont Law School

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### STATEMENT TAKING ACTION PLAN

**Purpose:** This is the action plan for taking statements/truths. The goal is to ensure that there are multiple avenues for taking statements including individual, private, confidential, group and public.

**Audience:** Impacted community members as outlined in Act 128. State institutions will have an opportunity to have a public session of their own to acknowledge participation in the harm.

	<b>In Person Public</b>	<b>Virtual Public</b>	<b>Private and/or confidential</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Online Submission</b>	<b>In person Public (Institutional)</b>
<b>Audience</b>	This gives those who would like to testify publicly that are part of the Act 128 Communities and are able to show in person the opportunity to do so.	This gives those who would like to testify but they are not able to be in person because of the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They no longer reside in this state.</li> <li>• They are homebound, transportation issues, etc.</li> <li>• Worried about safety</li> </ul>	This is for impacted community members who do not want to speak publicly. It is also for people who would like to remain anonymous.	Vulnerable populations who prefer or would be more suited to a group setting truth-telling atmosphere also for confidentiality (children, immuno-suppressed, elderly immune-suppressed)	Those who prefer to submit their statements electronically	This is to discuss with state agency representatives and their participation historically and presently with discrimination. Invitation to institutions who have benefited, for example UVM to discuss their role.
<b>Communication Method</b>	Video Recorded Transcribe	Video recorded Transcribe	Video and audio options	Summarization with themes using prompts:	Website upload	Video recorded Transcribe

	<b>In Person Public</b>	<b>Virtual Public</b>	<b>Private and/or confidential</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Online Submission</b>	<b>In person Public (Institutional)</b>
			Statements will be transcribed and for those who require confidentiality the transcription will be redacted	1. What does Vermont need to apologize to you for? 2. What does an apology look like to you?	Written (either by individual or trusted person) Audio recording Any other method of truth telling including but not limited to art, poetry short story, etc.	
<b>Frequency</b>	5 to encompass each part of the state	2 Virtual	Ongoing- January 2025-October 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for statement taking to occur during in person public statement taking events</li> <li>• Designated spaces throughout the state at trusted locations with people who are trained to be statement takers</li> </ul>	6 organizations will lead 2 sessions each.	Ongoing November 2024-October 2025 Internet submission opportunities – upload videos, written statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Health</li> <li>• Department of Children and Families</li> <li>• Agency of Education</li> <li>• Department of Corrections</li> <li>• Court Systems</li> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Legislation</li> <li>• Governor</li> <li>• State Universities ETC....</li> </ul>

	<b>In Person Public</b>	<b>Virtual Public</b>	<b>Private and/or confidential</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Online Submission</b>	<b>In person Public (Institutional)</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual office hours with statement takers</li> </ul>			
<b>Timeline</b>	November 2024 start promotion and determine dates to be held May 2025-August? 2025	November 2024 (start promotion and outreach) truth-telling January 2025- April 2025	November 2024 (Start with virtual office hours, lead into designated spaces February 2025) August 2025	May 2025-August 2025	November 2024-October 2025	August 2025-October 2025
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live streaming hybrid</li> <li>• Tech support</li> <li>• Tech equipment</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Language Services</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Venue</li> <li>• Support Rooms: Healing modalities/Clergy/Restorative Justice Trauma Informed people/Care workers for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live streaming</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Language Services</li> <li>• Breakout rooms: trauma informed professionals</li> <li>• Press</li> <li>• Tech support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stipends and agreements including non-disclosure and confidentiality for statement takers and designated spaces</li> <li>• Tech support/ equipment</li> </ul>	Stipends for organizations that will be arranging the groups	Website Secure submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live streaming hybrid</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Language Services</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Venue</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Tech equipment and support</li> </ul>

	<b>In Person Public</b>	<b>Virtual Public</b>	<b>Private and/or confidential</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Online Submission</b>	<b>In person Public (Institutional)</b>
	individuals/administrative support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press room</li> <li>• Documentary Room (Dr. Williams)</li> <li>• Feedback surveys</li> <li>• Input surveys for reconciliation recommendations to the state</li> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Stipends available to offset transportation and or food costs</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Parking shuttle</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Shuttle</li> <li>• Tech equipment and support</li> </ul>					



	<b>In Person Public</b>	<b>Virtual Public</b>	<b>Private and/or confidential</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Online Submission</b>	<b>In person Public (Institutional)</b>
<b>Setup</b>	Stage for impacted communities table to sit at as an option and podium as an option. Support person next to them if wanted. Commissioners at level with stage. Public at floor level behind the impacted communities. Monitors to view the front facing truth tellers.	Zoom Webinar where speakers are highlighted only invited let in to the space where truths are being given	Identification- Folders that coincide with video statements. Guided questions Video and audio equipment	This is dependent the community and the organization leading the groups	Help from SOV	Q and A Set up - No statements.  Tables with mic for agency representatives' podium for the person on staff to ask questions
<b>Potential Barriers</b>	Accessibility— Locations- Public Interruptions- Comments-Press Parking \$\$\$	Tech, Safety, Accessibility and language translation, internet access	Lack of statement takers, lack of designated spaces, \$\$\$, safety at location, statement takers not fully trained, language, geography, internet access	Confidentiality, ensuring safety and accessibility protocols are followed	Internet speed/bandwidth Security	Refusal to participate.

	<b>In Person Public</b>	<b>Virtual Public</b>	<b>Private and/or confidential</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Online Submission</b>	<b>In person Public (Institutional)</b>
<b>Confidentiality Options</b>	Not applicable	Not application	Yes – confidentiality forms and redaction available	This is confidential by nature	Upon request	Not applicable

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## REPORT AND FINAL ACTION PLAN

	<b>Official Legislative Report with Recommendations</b>	<b>Historical Anthology with Truth Statements</b>	<b>Condensed Plain Language Digestible Version with Recommendations and Stories</b>	<b>Final Presentation</b>
<b>Report Type &amp; Audience</b>	Legislature and the Governor	Vermont Historical Society- Archives - Libraries	EVERYONE!	EVERYONE!
<b>Timeline</b>	Ongoing with an emphasis for final push November 2025-  January 2027-May 2027 Report feedback and response Final submission May 2028	Collection of testimonies taken throughout the process, ongoing  Final formatting and organizing to occur January 2027-May 2027	January 2027-May 2027	January 2027 –May 2027 Prep/Planning May 2027 FINALE PRESENTATION
<b>Contents/ Set up</b>	Act 128 Mandate Requirements (see Commissioner Work Plan) and To Be Determined	Collection of all testimonies includes the bibliography	Plain Language Version of the TRC Process, Recommendations, and Integration of testimonies	In person Event With Technology Speakers Run of Show Videos Art, Music Copies of the Report both legislative and plain language
<b>Potential Barriers</b>	Time, Organization, Coding and Determining Patterns and Connections with Research	Length, Organization including integration of video, audio and written	Time and \$\$\$ Language/Accessibility, Distribution	Time and \$\$\$

<b>Contributors</b>	<p>VTRC Staff and Commissioners Interns Organizations hired to do groups and to give input on their recommendations through surveys and assessments. Public contribution Impacted Communities: What does an apology look like to you? Committee Members</p>	<p>VTRC Staff Publication Partners Vermont Historical Society Archives Libraries</p>	<p>VTRC Staff Educational professionals Committee Members</p>	<p>VTRC Staff Dr Van Dora Williams (any footage) Tech Support Committee Members Guest Speakers – Legislators Impacted Community Members who stand out. Art and Music by Impacted Community Members</p>

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