

MARCH 20, 2023

TOWN MEETING REPORT 2023

Senator Tanya Vyhovsky, Chittenden Central District

Town Meeting Update

In the five towns and cities that make up Chittenden Central district, there were lively and important town meetings with local elections and ballot items to discuss and vote on.

In Burlington there were 5 city council races and 8 ballot questions before the voters. An informational meeting was held ahead of town meeting and all Burlington voters were mailed a ballot to vote either by mail or in person. Six of the ballot initiatives passed and will make their way to the statehouse for approval.

In Winooski the city council became the nation's second all LGBTQ+ council, and there was overwhelming support for just cause eviction. In the town of Essex there was also great support for the new charter and a just cause eviction ordinance, and a vote from the floor to move permanently to Australian ballots for future town meeting votes. Colchester voters approved the building of a municipal recreation center. The city of Essex will hold its annual meeting on 4/11/2023, after the ability to move town meeting dates was granted to municipalities by the legislature at the beginning of this year.



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Senate Judiciary Committee

Senate Judiciary is a busy committee that navigates all things criminal justice related. In the first half of this session we have passed out eight bills that will all make the crossover deadline and we may have two additional bills that we will be seeking a crossover exemption for in the next week.

There are 3 new Senators on the judiciary committee bringing a holistic view of this system. We know that there were many challenges before the pandemic, and that the pandemic has exacerbated them, creating huge issues to be solved. We have explored court backlogs, bail, forensic mental health, hospital violence and many other difficult and heavy topics.

- **S.3 an act relating to prohibiting paramilitary training camps**

in response to the inability of the attorney general to intervene on behalf of the neighbors of Slate Ridge. This bill disallows the operation of civilian paramilitary training camps and creates civil injunctive relief to those close to them. This bill does not impact gun or hunter safety courses, shooting ranges or training for military, law enforcement or first responders.

- **S.4 an act relating to reducing crimes of violence associated with juveniles and dangerous weapons**

looks to solve some jurisdictional challenges within the youthful offender statutes and looks at modernizing the "big twelve" crimes to be reflective of today's statutes. It also aligns Vermont law with federal law when it comes to defacing serial numbers on guns, straw man purchases and fugitives from justice.

- **S.33 - An act relating to miscellaneous judiciary procedures**

is comprised of largely technical corrections and conforming changes. It also creates a new chapter in statute for laws about domestic terrorism.

- **S.89 - An act relating to establishing a forensic facility**

establishes a level of forensic care for those who are not able to be safely in the community but are lower acuity than hospitalization.



- **S.6 an act relating to interrogation practices**
disallows police from using coercive or dishonest interrogation techniques with any person under 22. It also tasks the criminal justice council to develop interrogation policy that must be enacted by all Vermont Police by 2025.
- **S.14 an act relating to a report on criminal justice investments and trends**
creates a robust report that looks at investments in the criminal justice system in education, mental health, substance use, domestic violence, job training and many other metrics. Looks at recidivism desistance, and the outcomes across race, gender, and poverty. This report can be a foundation to more just systems and safer communities.
- **S.27 an act relating to reducing the imposition of cash bail**
eliminates cash bail for non-violent misdemeanors in 2025. Cash bail is a system that imprisons people for being in poverty and many alternative systems of accountability have been shown to be more effective. A task force charged with working with national experts to identify what is needed to eliminate cash bail in Vermont is stood up in this bill.
- **S.36 an act relating to permitting an arrest without a warrant for assaults and threats against healthcare workers and disorderly conduct at health care facilities**

Senate Government Operations

Government Operations oversees everything that has to do with state government; from policing and elections, to municipal charters and pensions. This is a lively and very active committee.

Senate Government Operations has one returning Senator, and myself who was on House Government Operations, the rest of the committee is new. We spent much of the first part of the year getting everyone up to speed on the wide breadth of topics this committee touches. Still, we were able to pass 9 bills in advance of the crossover deadline.

- **an act relating to the modernization of public safety communications in Vermont**

creates new governance and regional emergency services dispatch plan. This bill sets up a funding mechanism, governance board, and transition board to try to unifying and modernize these services.

- **H.42 - an act relating to temporary alternative procedures for annual municipal meetings and electronic meetings of public bodies**

extended COVID virtual meeting and town meeting flexibility for two more years while we work on more permanent open meeting law changes.

- **H.46 - an act relating to approval of the dissolution of Colchester Fire District No.3**

- **S.9 an act relating to the authority of the State Auditor to examine the books and records of State contractors.**

made explicit that the State Auditor is an agent of the state and may examine relevant records pertaining to state contractors.

- **S.17 an act relating to sheriff reforms**

provides a more uniform procedure manual for sheriffs, limits the discretionary money and how it may be used, & sets up a study to look at other needed reforms. There is very little that can be done without a change to the VT constitution to regulate sheriffs.



- **S.32 - an act relating to ranked-choice voting for presidential primary elections**

establishes a summer working group to provide guidance for how to implement ranked choice voting in state and federal elections in 2026, moves to ranked choice for the 2028 primary, and allows municipalities to adopt ranked choice without a charter change.

- **S.39 an act relating to compensation and benefits for members of the Vermont General Assembly**

updates benefits and compensation for the general assembly for the first time in 20 years. Allows members to take part in the state employees health plan, and aligns their pay with that of the average Vermont wage. I hope this makes the general assembly more accessible for more Vermonters.

- **S.42 an act relating to divestment of State pension funds from investments in the fossil fuel industry**

requires that a plan is created to divest the pension funds from the fossil fuel industry over time. There are multiple safeguards in this bill to ensure that pensioners are not negatively impacted.

- **S.104 an act relating to designating August 31 as Overdose Awareness Day**

designates 8/31 as Overdose Awareness Day for the next ten years and all state flags will be lowered in memorial of those who have died.



OTHER SENATE WORK

Priority Work

Upcoming Events

Screening and Panel Discussion: To Be Fair: Sarah Fair George and the Fight for Justice in Vermont
March 29, 6:00 pm
University of Vermont, Grand Maple Ballroom

Trans Day of Visibility Burlington
March 31, 2023

Purchasing your First Electric Car
March 22, 12:00-1:00
Webinar: [NEFCU](#)

Farmers Night: Bryan Blanchette and the Black Bears: Abenaki Singer Song Writer
March 22, 7:00 pm
Vermont State House

Education for Social Justice Conference
April 1, 9:00 am
White River Valley High School, South Royalton



Childcare

S.56 includes some aspects of parental leave, a study for universal full day public pre-k, and an increase in subsidies for childcare for those earning up to 185% of the federal poverty limit without co-pay and up to 600% with co-pays. This bill will make stops in both finance and appropriations before coming to the floor.

Housing

The omnibus housing bill, S.100, includes many initiatives to help with building, affordability and conservation. This bill promotes multi-family housing, and invests in workforce development and supportive housing initiatives.

DMV Miscellaneous Bill

S.99 modernizes the way in which we conduct DMV services. It will allow for digital registration proof (much like we do now for insurance) and will eliminate the need for license plate stickers which are no longer used and are costly to the state. It will also look at weight limits on roads through a study.

Affordable Heat Act

S.5 tasks the rules committee to create the structures to enact an affordable and sustainable heat standard in Vermont. The rules committee will present their work to the legislature in 2025 and action will be taken then.

Shield Bill

S.37 does nothing to change current medical practice in Vermont, but does provide legal protections for providers and patients who are seeking legal health care in Vermont.

Epi-Pen Bill

S.65 will eliminate the cost share (co-pays/co-insurance) for epinephrine auto-injectors used for severe allergic reactions.