

# DECLARATION OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Town of \_\_\_\_\_ condemns racism and welcomes all persons regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age or disability, or socioeconomic status, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community.

As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all our actions, policies and operating procedures reflect this commitment.

The Town of \_\_\_\_\_ is and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.

Adopted this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_

Town/City of \_\_\_\_\_, Vermont

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## **REASONS TO ADOPT DECLARATION OF INCLUSION**

- 1) Vermont is in competition for businesses. Organizations that come to individual towns and employees to make them grow are vital. The Declaration of Inclusion positions our state to better compete, domestically and internationally.
- 2) Most Vermont towns are losing population and those who remain are aging. Young people get their education and leave the state. New young families are not coming here. In the long run, that's disastrous.
- 3) The Governor and key growth business organizations in Vermont have strongly endorsed the diversity and inclusion initiative. Among them are the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and the Vermont Council on Rural Development.
- 4) In guiding a town in addressing its various challenges and opportunities, it is increasingly important that town leaders be creative, positive and forward thinking. Including people and demographic trends is a vital part of town leadership's responsibility.
- 5) Adopting a Declaration of Inclusion is an opportunity for towns, whether farming/forestry, tourist or business based, to stand with 140+ Vermont towns that have seen the connection and endorsed the concept that diversity is healthy for any community.
- 6) Vermont Futures, the research arm of the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, in July 2023 reported on the positive, direct connection between growth and diversity. See our website, [vtdeclarationofinclusion.org](http://vtdeclarationofinclusion.org).
- 7) Lastly, there is power when any entity, including Vermont towns, stand together. There is a reason why businesses, and even government and not for profit organizations, advertise and promote their strengths. As a truly unique state, Vermont has a truly unique and powerful opportunity to be seen as.... and reap the benefits of being.... a welcoming state.

## Celebrating Inclusion – A Path Towards a Brighter Future in Vermont

- May 9, 2023
- Kevin Chu

In 2021, Governor Phil Scott first established the second week of May as Inclusion Week. Annually, the event recognizes that the State of Vermont condemns discrimination in all forms and welcomes all people who want to live, work, and visit Vermont.

The Vermont Declaration of Inclusion is an ongoing grassroots initiative advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion by working with municipalities to recognize and acknowledge inequities and commit to improving by adopting the Declaration for their community.

As of April 23, 2023, 110 towns and cities, home to 65.8% of Vermont's population, have adopted the Declaration of Inclusion.

The Vermont Futures Project took a deeper dive into the data to find the following:

- **71.5%** – Rutland County leads the way with the highest percentage of municipalities adopting the Declaration within their county. Washington County is second at 70% and Lamoille rounds out the top 3 at 63.6%.
- **67% of population growth** – Of the total population growth reported in the Census between 2010 – 2020, two-thirds of it happened in municipalities that support the Declaration.
- **50 over 50** – 50% of counties (7 of 14) have over 50% of their towns and cities adopting the Declaration.
- **66% of housing units** – The 50% of counties with over 50% of municipalities that have adopted the Declaration account for about two-thirds of Vermont's housing stock.

### Why It Matters

Vermont is the second oldest and second whitest state in the country. Countless stories have been written about the brain drain phenomenon and the threat of rural decline. About 100,000 Vermonters will reach retirement age in the next decade.

The Declaration of Inclusion says that we want to write a new chapter in Vermont's story and create the conditions for our state to evolve towards a thriving future for all. It's an important symbolic action that embraces difference and dispels the zero-sum myth. From



economic, environmental, and equity perspectives, creating welcoming and inclusive communities throughout the state is good for Vermont's future.

### **Housing is Required for A Place to Feel Like Home**

A recent episode of On Point explored why Americans are leaving big cities. Even though 80% of Americans live in urban areas, about half of Americans say they preferred to live in small towns and rural places. The continued evolution and decoupling of home and work is projected to rebalance the distribution of America's population towards smaller metro and even rural areas.

The places that will benefit from redistribution are the places that are proactively planning for this transition. The past three years have provided sufficient data to demonstrate what increased demand for a limited supply of housing units will do to prices. If demand persists without addressing supply, our communities will experience rural gentrification and the overall population will plateau based simply on housing capacity.

### **The Power of Saying Yes**

The Vermont Futures Project asked a question in the Vermonter Poll last year about growing Vermont's population to strengthen its workforce. The results were: 49% – Yes, 38% – No, 13% – Unsure.

Let's consider these responses in a community context along with the Declaration of Inclusion. Municipalities that support population growth and adopt a Declaration of Inclusion will pursue community development strategies that are different than places that don't prioritize inclusion and don't support population growth.

Which of these pathways is likely to lead to more houses? Which of these pathways is more likely to lead to more diverse and resilient communities?

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## Frequently Asked Questions

**1. If the Governor has issued a Proclamation for the State, why does each town have to do it?**

Discussion by citizens of each town is important and each town should decide on what form implementation should take. Each town can craft a statement of Declaration, within our guidelines, to reflect the wishes of town leadership and citizens.

**2. We're not racists. Why do we need this Declaration?**

We are not suggesting that you are racists. Quite the contrary. The Declaration merely states publicly that everyone is welcome to visit and to live in your town and that you are committed to preserving that safe, positive environment. The intent is to raise consciousness about the importance of diversity and the positive effect that it can have on Vermont's economy. Please recall that Governor Scott recently said: "The fact is if we want stronger, more economically secure communities, we need more people and more diversity in Vermont."

**3. If we like our town the way it is, why should we want to adopt this statement?**

To make Vermont a popular and desirable destination, every town should be respectful and welcoming to all residents. Ideally every resident should feel a sense of belonging. Most towns are struggling to maintain population and therefore to maintain their tax base; new residents bring vitality.

**4. I have never seen any racism in our town so why would we want to adopt this statement?**

Racism is rarely seen or felt by those who are not the target of it. We want to create a statewide culture of tolerance and welcoming for moral reasons and for economic reasons. Vermont needs people, it needs younger people, and it needs diversity.

**5. Why do we need such a Declaration when this is covered in the U.S. Constitution?**

The post-Civil War 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution abolished slavery, gave citizenship to all people born in the U.S., and gave



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...ing communities to unity, and emphasizing that our community welcomes and ensures the safety of all people, especially those historically marginalized.

## 6. **Why can't we just say "ALL" people? Isn't identifying those individual groups of people further increasing separation?**

We have thought long and hard about that question and have concluded: Many communities have promotional statements designed to welcome and invite visitors. The Declaration of Inclusion is not a public relations or promotional piece. It tells the world that Vermont has seriously thought about its history and the present status of discrimination and racism in the U.S. And it wants everyone, all people, specifically those identified as historically marginalized to know that Vermonters, town by town, community by community, resident by resident, are attempting to live up to both the spirit and intent of a living Constitution.

## 7. **Does adopting this statement open the town to increased liability?**

The legal team at Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) has looked at our recommended statement and determined that towns do not increase their liability in any way by adopting.

## 8. **If our towns adopt a declaration, is some form of implementation expected?**

Yes, we have a Guide to Implementation on our website. In addition, VLCT has created the Justice, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging toolkit and the Vermont Office of Racial Equity has established the IDEAL (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action, Leadership) program to help local leaders advance equity in their communities: [racialequity.vermont.gov/ideal-vermont](https://racialequity.vermont.gov/ideal-vermont). We believe making citizens aware of the Declaration is critical to a town's success in implementing its goals.

## 9. **Will implementation be an additional expense?**

Implementation is important and most steps can be done at little or no cost. The Vermont Community Foundation has established a fund for which towns can apply for grants of up to \$10,000. Funds are focused on supporting communities participating in the IDEAL (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action, and Leadership) Vermont program. However, a limited number of grants continue to be available for communities not participating in the IDEAL program. In addition, some towns have

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Following the adoption of a Declaration of Inclusion by the Select Board of Franklin in 2020, the first such statement in the State, a team of citizens began presenting the idea to other Vermont towns. The team now includes five full-time residents of Rutland County. This group of volunteers shares a vision of Vermont being the most welcoming, safe, and secure state in the country for everyone, especially those who have been historically marginalized. Adoption and implementation of a Declaration of Inclusion by all 247 Vermont cities and towns is the group's collective goal.

## 11. **What is the difference between DEI and the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion?**

Historically, DEI initiatives started as a workplace focused effort that sought to assure non-discrimination in recruitment, working environments and promotion practices within both public and private employment settings. We understand that today, DEI has become highly politicized, and confusion exists around its meaning.

The Declaration of Inclusion has a clear, broader objective. It is oriented towards encouraging Vermont municipalities to promote and to publicize that they are a welcoming, safe community for all people, especially historically marginalized people, who want to visit, move to, live in, raise their families, feel they are welcome and they belong. In our view an inclusive environment will also be a more dynamic and diverse one. It recognizes our sameness while celebrating our differences. Thus, honoring our shared humanity, without creating a sense of division.

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*share on social media*

*Vermont's Declaration of Inclusion is a grassroots effort working with community leaders to reinforce the message that Vermont is a safe and welcoming place for all.*

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