

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – October 10, 2025

Incivility and Discrimination Incidents Threaten Vermont's Welcoming Image

RUTLAND, VT – Vermont is seeing increasing reports of racial and other discriminatory incidents in our schools, town halls and workplaces. It appears Vermont is not entirely insulated from the national trend of rising incivility and decreasing empathy and that our reputation as one of the most inclusive, welcoming states is facing challenges from within.

“Is this direction we want for our State? The Vermont Declaration of Inclusion Initiative believes we can do better,” said Bob Harnish, its founder. “We are using this important moment to step up our support to actively partner with towns to ensure they can successfully meet their community goals.”

Ideas for implementation for Declaration of Inclusion towns:

Welcome & Connect Newcomers

- Launch a Concierge Program and organize social events (potlucks, receptions) in collaboration with community groups to welcome and connect new residents.

Promote Diverse Culture & Learning

- Sponsor educational events (films, speakers, exhibitions) through libraries.

Communicate & Display

- Publicize the Declaration across the town website, newsletter, annual report, and physical display in the town office.

In addition, the Initiative is delighted to announce that Marsha Cassel of Rutland Town has joined our group to lead Implementation efforts. Marsha is a dedicated Vermont educator and Family Mediator. She holds degrees from Middlebury College, the University of Vermont, and Champlain College (M.S. in Mediation). She spent 25 years as an award-winning public-school teacher of multiple subjects, including French, Spanish, Civics, and Global Studies, earning recognition as a Rowland Foundation Fellow in 2014 and the 2017 Vermont Humanities Educator of the Year.

“I am committed to social justice, community understanding, and civil dialogue,” said Cassel. “I am eager to start working with our communities so that we provide welcoming spaces for newcomers to meet neighbors, build relationships, and become active participants in the community.”

To date, 164 towns and cities, home to more than 80% of the population have adopted the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion. It is supported by the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

Additional information on the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion may be found at vtdeclarationofinclusion.org. This website is generously furnished by and maintained by the Vermont Chamber of Commerce.

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