

PRESS RELEASE

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Vermont Declaration of Inclusion Initiative Reaches New Milestones in May 2024

Rutland, VT – To date, 150 Vermont cities and towns, home to more than 77% of the state’s population, have adopted the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion to ensure all residents, visitors and people considering moving to their community feel welcome, safe, and that they belong. On May 1, 2024, Governor Phil Scott pronounced the second week of May, “Inclusion Week,” his fourth such proclamation. “The State must and will continue to address the challenges of achieving racial and ethnic equity across Vermont and to nurture the diverse society in which we want our youth to live and prosper,” declared Scott.

Begun as a grassroots initiative by community members in the Rutland area, the Declaration of Inclusion has gained momentum with the help of Vermont Interfaith Action, Vermont Chamber of Commerce, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and the Vermont Council on Rural Development. These groups’ efforts were recognized at a press conference on May 9 at the State Capitol that was organized by Vermont Interfaith Action.

At the press conference, Rep. Kevin “Coach” Christie of White River Junction and a member of the NAACP, wondered if Vermont considers itself a welcoming state, why do people leave the state? “It’s important for our state to grow and ensure that when people come, they want to stay and can stay,” said Christie.

Willie Docto, an innkeeper in Duxbury and chair of the Vermont Chamber of Commerce’s diversity, equity and inclusion task force, pointed out that the mission of the Chamber is to advance the Vermont economy and that the Declaration of Inclusion is essential in advancing the Vermont economy. “I hope that news of what’s happening here, spreads far and wide,” said Docto. “And people beyond Vermont know that there are communities across our state that are eager to welcome them.”

Ted Brady, Executive Director of Vermont League of Cities and Towns said his organization tries to offer an aspirational vision for what municipal government should be in Vermont. “And what else should it be other than a place where everyone feels empowered, everyone feels welcome, and everyone feels like they belong in Vermont,” asked Brady.

The Vermont Declaration of Inclusion Initiative will continue to reach out to all municipalities in the state so they can weigh in on the Declaration. A second phase of the initiative’s work is underway to assist those communities that have already adopted the declaration to implement it. “Adoption is just the first step,” explained Initiative founder, Bob Harnish. “We then ask our towns to bring it to their residents so true inclusion becomes a work in progress.”

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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