



State of Vermont

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For immediate release

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PRESS RELEASE

**Secretary of State Jim Condos Thanks the VT Legislature
For a Productive Legislative Year**

For the Secretary of State's office, 2016 was another very productive legislative year. Automatic voter registration was a groundbreaking achievement as Vermont continues to lead the nation in voting rights. However, many other less flashy but equally important pieces of legislation deserve attention as well. Among them are improvements to efficiency in government, making it easier to do business in Vermont, and public protection through professional regulation.

Secretary Jim Condos stated, "Thank you to Speaker Shap Smith and Senate President Pro Tem John Campbell for leading these important bills to passage. House Government Operations Chair Donna Sweaney has been a champion for our good government initiatives for many years. All three of them will be greatly missed. Thank you to Senator Jeanette White as well for her hard work on many of these initiatives making a difference for Vermonters."

Here is a summary of accomplishments:

ADMINISTRATIVE

H.875 – Budget (also called the "Big Bill")

This is our appropriation to operate –our budget was supported by the Administration and the Legislature as an important and necessary piece of government operations. The Secretary of State's Office operates without any General Funds.

ELECTIONS

H.458 – Automatic Voter Registration

This may be one of the most important bills passed this session with the potential to have a huge impact on voter participation in our democracy. Vermont was 4th in the nation to pass such a law and the first without partisan debate.

CORPORATIONS

H.868 – Economic Development

This bill contains many provisions, among them merger and conversion language making it easier and more consistent for business to convert from other business forms and merge. This bill also contains language about the "blockchain" (authentication technology) designed to encourage use of blockchain technology in Vermont, but not requiring its use.

H.84 – Internet Dating

A provision of this bill allows our business registration division to modify the status of a business that has been convicted of fraud or is subject to a cease and desist order from a court. Aimed at home builder fraud, it allows us to flag a registered business subject to a court order to warn the public.

VT STATE ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

H.629 – Vital Records Study committee

The State Archivist will participate in a group to recommend changes to how we handle vital records in the state and make sure they are not overly accessible and susceptible to fraudulent use.

OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL REGULATION

H.562 – OPR Bill

The annual professional regulation bill has the usual updates to regulated professions. It also allows OPR to perform reviews for the appropriateness of ongoing regulation of existing professions. This bill transfers to OPR the licensure of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs from the Department of Health as well as Potable Water Supply and Wastewater System Designers and Pollution Abatement facility Operators from the Department of Environmental Conservation in a time and money saving move. Last, it requires 7 other agencies in state government doing licensing to collect and report data on how they do it to identify other potential areas where we could share resources and best practices.

S.20 – Dental Practitioners

A new licensed category of dental professional is created in this bill. It is designed to increase access to oral health care and these professionals will be regulated by the Dental Board.

H.355 – Forester licensing

A public protection driven bill restricting who can call themselves a “forester” and manage forests. This is both a landowner protection measure as well as something that will ensure one of our state’s greatest assets – our forests – are responsibly managed for harvest, for conservation, and for enjoyment by all for years to come.

OPEN MEETINGS

S.114 – Open Meeting Law

Several minor adjustments were made to clarify the law and allow public bodies to comply with open meeting laws.

Coming in 2017

Notaries Public

This Bill did not get to the finish line this session but will return next year. Vermont’s notary laws were written in the late 1700s and 1800s. It is important to update our ancient notary laws and to make sure the notary commissioning process is efficient and works well.

Ethics Commission

While the Legislature ran out of time to complete a bill this year, we think this should remain a top priority and will participate in another attempt next year based on the lessons learned this time around.

These bills allow the Secretary of State’s office to continue to improve productivity and efficiency while protecting the public. Again, we thank the Government Operations committees and the Vermont Legislature for action on these important issues.

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