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*Kristin L. Clouser, Secretary*

From: Xusana Davis, Executive Director of Racial Equity

To: Chair Richard Sears Jr.  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Testimony on H.546, An act relating to Racial Justice Statistics  
Read to the Committee by Jay Greene, Racial Equity Policy and Research Analyst

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This bill seeks to close a gap in administration, operations, data, and policy by streamlining the process of aggregating and analyzing criminal justice data. More importantly, these activities would happen using a racial equity lens, which will help the state dig deeper into the racial disparities that persist for residents and visitors across Vermont. While the Office supports the bill, there are several factors we ask the Committee to keep in mind to ensure we set the proposed Division of Racial Justice Statistics (DRJS) up for success.

First, the staffing. Data experts from within state government and from outside state government participated in the Racial Disparities in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Advisory Panel's (RDAP) deliberations for months. The members of RDAP agreed on a minimum number of five staff to handle the prescribed workload effectively. Through negotiations in the House chamber, the DRJS staffing has been reduced to three staff members in the current draft of H.546. The Office strongly urges the Committee not to reduce this number any further. Data architecture and data infrastructure management are highly specialized professions. There is an industry-wide set of activities that each of these positions is expected to perform. By cutting the staffing any further, we would further risk having too few doing too much, especially since the timelines for the completion of this work were based on having five staff members as originally recommended by the RDAP.

Second, the legal support. The Agency of Administration is quite small, with bare-bones central staffing. Despite the Agency's statewide reach, it has no General Counsel's office and instead relies on the Attorney General's Office for its legal needs. As the proposed Division of Racial Justice Statistics will need to create Memoranda of Understanding and participate in other regulatory processes, it will be important to ensure the Office of the Attorney General is aware of the expectation and has capacity to support the work of the DRJS.

The most important part of this work is not the data collection and analysis, but rather, the actions we take as a result of what we learn. We see this bill and the workstream that it creates as a step towards better policy that is more insightful and more inclusive. As such, we remind the committee that this is an investment that will help us make better investments in the future. This Division is not the end of our investment in justice equity. We look forward to working with the accompanying Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council (if it is created) and the Legislature on these matters.