STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE CAPITOL POLICE DEPARTMENT

Submitted by the Sergeant at Arms and Chief of Police
Pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 70(e)
October 28, 2026

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STATE OF VERMONT
SERGEANT AT ARMS

MEMORANDUM

To: Joint Legislative Management Committee

From: Agatha Kessler, Sergeant at Arms

Date: October 28, 2026

Subject: Strategic Plan for the Capitol Police Department

The past two years represent a period of significant transformation for State House Security and the Capitol Police Department (Department). During this time, a comprehensive security screening program was implemented, a security camera system was installed, threats involving legislators are promptly investigated, and programs have been developed to support the safety and security of lawmakers in their homes. The Department has benefited from steady leadership, and officer morale has improved. With these foundational improvements in place, the Department's momentum is anticipated to continue into the next biennium, recognizing that threats to lawmakers and the State House will continue to require a high level of vigilance, engagement, and preparedness.

Chief John Poleway was appointed Chief in March 2024. Since that time, the Department has made significant progress in strengthening its organizational capabilities and advancing its mission to protect the State House, Capitol Complex, elected officials, employees, and members of the public. Through strategic hiring, professional development, proactive security initiatives, and expanded partnerships, the Department has continued to evolve into a more capable, adaptable, and mission-focused law enforcement organization.

The Department has adopted a proactive approach to identifying and addressing security concerns and continues to work collaboratively with partners to implement appropriate corrective measures. This proactive approach supports a broader security strategy focused on identifying and mitigating risks before they develop into incidents.

A key component of the Department's progress has been the recruitment and development of highly qualified, professional officers, each bringing specialized skills, knowledge, and operational experience to the Department. In addition to their technical and law enforcement expertise, officers recognize their responsibility to serve in the "People's House"—a place where everyone should feel safe, secure, and welcome. This commitment to service is central to the Department's mission and its relationship with the members, employees and visitors.

Moving forward, the strategic plan establishes a framework for continued collaboration and development to ensure that Vermont's State House, lawmakers and legislative operations are protected.

I. Purpose and Mission

Pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 70(e), the Sergeant at Arms, in consultation with the Chief, shall prepare, maintain, and update, at least biennially, a strategic plan for the Capitol Police Department, which shall be subject to review and approval by the Joint Legislative Management Committee.

Act 29 of 1999 established the Vermont Capitol Police Department (Department) to provide policing services to the Vermont State House, members of the General Assembly, dignitaries, visitors, and staff. The Vermont State House, located in Montpelier, is the capitol of the State of Vermont and the seat of the General Assembly. Statewide government officials with an office in the State House include the Governor and Lieutenant Governor.

The mission of the Department is dedicated to protecting the General Assembly, its members, employees, visitors and facilities - so that legislators can fulfill their constitutional and legislative responsibilities in a safe, secure and welcoming environment.

Pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 62(a), a principal duty of the Department is to secure and protect the State House and buildings used for legislative operations. The Department assesses the physical framework of each site including perimeter security, building envelope, security force, access control and technologic security systems.

In addition to its duty to protect legislative buildings, the Department provides and responds to requests for mutual aid from other law enforcement agencies. Mutual aid is a force multiplier and allows law enforcement agencies to share resources and expertise for emergency and protection situations. The Department relies on the aid of partner agencies and must, in turn, be prepared to reciprocate.

The need to support lawmakers' safety at home has increasingly become a subject of concern. In 2026, the Lawmaker Security Program was established to allocate a one-time award to support lawmakers' safety at home. As the need for protecting lawmakers outside the State Capitol evolves, the Department aims to assess and evaluate its ability and duty to appropriately provide protection services.

II. Jurisdiction and Partners

Pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 70(c), the Department shall provide security within the State House and assist the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services in providing security and law enforcement services within the Capitol Complex, pursuant to the memorandum of understanding (MOU) required by 29 V.S.A. § 171(f).

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The following memorandums codify partnership agreements:

Memorandum of Understanding	Scope
BGS, Judiciary and General Assembly	29 V.S.A. § 171(f), to provide security services for the Complex.
City of Montpelier and Capitol Police	To provide dispatch and mutual aid.
Judiciary and General Assembly	Additional site addendum for security officers.
Washington County Law Enforcement	Mutual aid agreement.

The Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) maintains buildings, grounds and systems in use by the General Assembly that directly support and impact security operations, including:

a. Electrical and fire systems
b. Access Control system
c. State House lawn maintenance and activities
d. Grounds maintenance, including parking lots and landscaping
e. Any building maintenance that impacts safety and security
f. After-hours security patrol

Department patrol area includes:

a. 115 State Street- the State House
b. 2 Aiken
c. 1 Baldwin
d. 4 Aiken
e. Parking lots during the legislative session.
f. Any other building, room or space used for legislative operations.

III. Building and Grounds Security Objectives

The original State House was built in 1859 and is a registered National Historic Landmark. Initiatives to secure the building must balance its value as a historic landmark and purpose as a public building and workplace for lawmakers.

Through internal assessment and evaluations of third-party security experts, the following building and grounds security objectives have been identified:

1. Building and Perimeter Security: Protecting the State House building includes an assessment of the grounds, roadways, walkways, utilities and the facility. The State House is located on an elevated plain and directly adjacent to a public lawn to the south and hillside to the north. The northside backs up to wooden terrain and the Hubbard Park trail system. Vehicles can approach the building without restriction within 400 feet of the facility. The Department should consider reinforcing structures, securing glass and restricting sensitive areas in and around the facility.

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2. Emergency Vehicle access: Emergency vehicles access the State House via Aiken Avenue for both medical and fire calls. The intersection of Aiken Avenue and Baldwin streets becomes congested and sometimes impassable when vehicles and buses do not have adequate space to maneuver. Designated Tour Bus parking on Baldwin Street has proven to prevent congestion and gridlock. The Department should ensure that parking ordinances are enforced.

3. Aerial security: Aircrafts and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) are allowed to operate in the airspace above the State House. BGS processes and approves requests for UAS flights above the State House. Unapproved or unknown flights over the State House are a concern. The Department should employ a detection system and investigate how best to restrict airspace.

4. Access Control: Access control refers to the security system that regulates entrance to the building and rooms within the building. The State House utilizes both electronic access control devices and lock/key to secure doors. During the legislative session, all exterior doors are locked, and the public entrance is monitored. Authorized individuals with a State-issued identification badge are granted access to the building through the secure entrances. Visitors must enter through the Public Entrance. The Department should tighten access controls and have administrator access to the system.

5. Emergency Notification System: The State House operates both a security system and a fire alarm system. The security system is maintained by the Department and alerts when a lockout, lockdown or other emergency protocol is activated (e.g., an intruder alert). The State House fire alarm system is maintained by BGS and alerts when smoke or fire is detected. These two systems are intricately integrated in a manner that makes maintenance, testing and upgrades burdensome and complex. The Department should establish a unified emergency management system.

6. Security screening: During the legislative session, all exterior doors are locked, and visitors are screened at the public entrance. The walkway to the public entrance is uncovered and the screening vestibule was not built for screening purposes. The Department should ensure visitors are protected from the elements and experience a positive and effective screening process at the public entrance.[1]

IV. Department Objectives

Over the previous two years, the Department has strengthened its capabilities through personnel and policy development, specialized training, proactive security assessments, improved access-control procedures, expanded partnerships, and participation in protective and specialized operations.

[1] Act 163 of 2026 established funding for entryway upgrades. This project will contribute substantially to the Department's ability to execute an effective and positive screening process.

The Department continues to evolve in response to emerging threats, advancing technology, large-scale events, and changes in the operational environment. Through continued efforts to recruit and train experienced officers, maintain equipment, integrate technology, secure infrastructure, and strengthen partnerships, the Department is prepared to protect the General Assembly and support the safe and effective operation of the Vermont General Assembly.

To maintain a high level of performance and ensure continued readiness, the following Department objectives have been identified:

1. Training: Continuous training supports appropriate and lawful enforcement of Vermont laws, rules, and policies. The Department should establish a core training module, engage in scenario-based training and support physical fitness.

2. Uniforms and equipment: Properly maintained and appropriately selected uniforms and equipment are essential to officer safety, operational readiness, and effective public safety operations. The Department should continuously review its uniforms and equipment to ensure it aligns with Department objectives and mission.
    a. Uniforms: An officer's uniform communicates their role, authority, and purpose to building occupants. Department officers currently wear a "Patrol uniform" equipped with a range of equipment and an external vest. The Department should continuously review and evaluate uniforms to ensure appropriateness, functionality and alignment with Department needs.
    b. Equipment: Properly maintained equipment is essential to officer safety, operational readiness, and effective public safety operations in the Capitol. Equipment should provide officers with the tools necessary to perform their assigned duties safely and professionally while supporting communication, de-escalation, and effective response to changing operational demands. The Department should maintain equipment to respond to emerging threats, advancing technology, large-scale events, and changes in the operational environment.

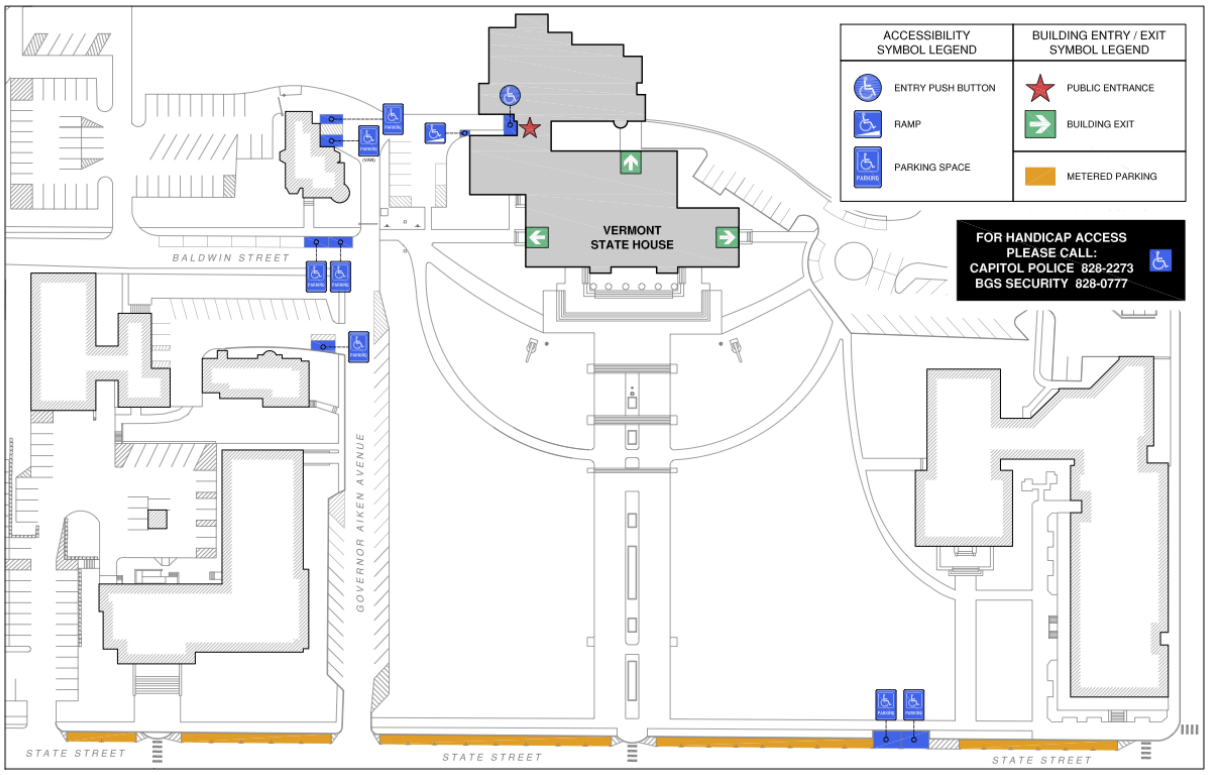
3. Lawmaker Safety: As threats to lawmakers continue to increase, the Department should continue to evaluate and strengthen measures to improve the safety of members both at the State House and at home. A comprehensive approach includes education, training, threat assessment, coordination with law enforcement partners, and consideration of security resources beyond the State House.

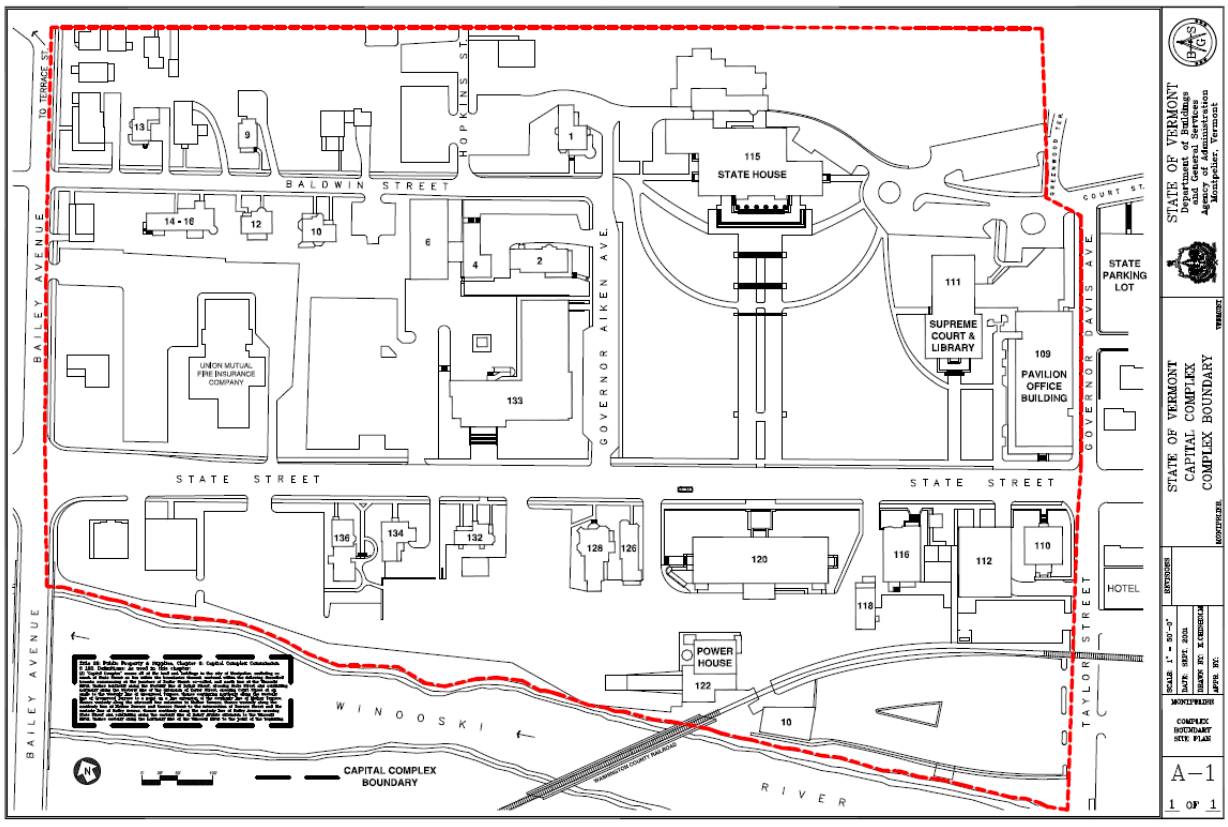
V. Further Recommendations

The Sergeant at Arms office should consider modifications to statutory language to reflect changes in the form and function of security services at the State House and in the spaces used for legislative operations.

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Attachment A
Map of the State House and Grounds
Capitol Complex





Attachment B
Statutory Duties

2 V.S.A. § 62 Legislative duties

(a) The Sergeant at Arms shall:

(1) execute orders of either house, the Joint Legislative Management Committee, the Committee on Joint Rules, or the House or Senate Committee on Rules;

(2) maintain order among spectators and take measures to prevent interruption of either house or any committee thereof;

(3) arrange for special meetings and conferences at the State House;

(4) provide for the distribution of mail to all legislators;

(5) schedule the time for the use of rooms for committee meetings and hearings;

(6) maintain the State House and its furnishings in good repair in consultation with the State Curator;

(7) provide for the establishment of a cafeteria and supervise its operation;

(8) provide security for the State House, pursuant to the responsibilities set forth in 29 V.S.A. § 171; and

(9) perform such other duties for the benefit of the legislators as may be required by any duly authorized committee thereof.

(b) The Sergeant at Arms or any person employed by the Sergeant at Arms shall not accept any compensation or gift for the services of the Sergeant at Arms or any of the employee's services other than the Sergeant at Arms' or the employee's salary, respectively. Any person who violates this provision shall be fined $25.00.

(c) The Sergeant at Arms shall not be responsible for:

(1) structural repairs or capital improvements to the State House building;

(2) the maintenance of the State House building;

(3) curating the historic State House and its collections; or

(4) the use, upkeep, or maintenance of the State House grounds.

(d) The Sergeant at Arms and employees of the Sergeant at Arms shall seek guidance from and operate in accordance with policies adopted by the Joint Legislative Management Committee.

2 V.S.A. § 70 Capitol Police Department

(a) Creation. The Capitol Police Department is created within the Office of the Sergeant at Arms. The Sergeant at Arms shall appoint and may remove, at his or her pleasure, individuals as Capitol Police officers, one of whom shall be appointed to serve as Chief. All such positions shall be exempt State employees. The Chief shall supervise the officer force under the direction of the Sergeant at Arms. Such appointments and all oaths or affirmations shall be in writing and filed with the Sergeant at Arms. An officer shall also serve as a Deputy Sergeant at Arms and as a notary public pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 442.

(b) Powers; training.

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(1) A Capitol Police officer shall have all the same powers and authority as sheriffs and other law enforcement officers anywhere in the State, which shall include the authority to arrest persons and enforce the civil and criminal laws, keep the peace, provide security, and serve civil and criminal process. For this purpose, a Capitol Police officer shall subscribe to the same oaths required for sheriffs.
(2) Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, a Capitol Police officer shall be a Level II or Level III law enforcement officer certified by the Vermont Criminal Justice Council pursuant to the provisions of 20 V.S.A. chapter 151, except that the Chief of the Capitol Police shall be a Level III certified law enforcement officer.

(c) Coordination of Capitol Complex security. The Capitol Police Department shall provide security within the State House and assist the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services in providing security and law enforcement services within the Capitol Complex, pursuant to the memorandum of understanding required by 29 V.S.A. § 171(f).

(d) Training; equipment. At State expense and with the approval of the Sergeant at Arms, Capitol Police officers shall be provided with training and furnished uniforms and equipment necessary in the performance of their duties, and such items shall remain the property of the State.

(e) Strategic plan. The Sergeant at Arms, in consultation with the Chief, shall prepare, maintain, and update, at least biennially, a strategic plan for the Capitol Police Department, which shall be subject to review and approval by the Joint Legislative Management Committee.

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