

# Vermont Becomes Seventh Sweatfree State

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## Governor Douglas Signs Anti-Sweatshop Law at Brattleboro Union High School

Brattleboro, Vermont-- Today Vermont became the seventh "sweatfree" state in the United States when Governor Jim Douglas signed a sweatshop-free purchasing policy into law.

The Governor's signing ceremony was held at Brattleboro Union High School. Members of the student organization Child Labor Education and Action (CLEA) had initiated and led the campaign to pass the law.

Hannah Viens, a senior, said: "CLEA advocates for the human rights of child laborers and sweatshop workers. We've held conferences to educate students. Today, before the bill signing, we presented to our classmates about how the bill is a concrete way to humanize the global economy."

Whitney Smith, another senior, said: "It's important for students and community members to realize that sweatshops are prevalent in the garment industry. Our research shows that Vermont is currently buying products made by companies that have been cited for labor violations. That's why we pushed for this law" to urge companies to improve conditions in their factories and respect workers' rights."

The 'Act Relating to State Purchasing of Apparel, Footwear, or Textiles', H.338, was introduced by Representative Sarah Edwards and 17 other cosponsors in 2007. In 2008, it passed both the House and Senate with full support. The bill requires companies selling uniforms and apparel purchased with our tax dollars to respect workers' rights in their supply chains. Suppliers must follow applicable labor laws and respect workers' freedom of association. For transparency's sake, in order to qualify for a bid, companies must disclose the locations of the cut-and-sew factories.

With the adoption of the sweatfree purchasing law, Vermont joins six other states (California, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Maine, New Jersey and New York). In addition, dozens of cities, counties, and school districts have sweatfree policies, totaling 180 in all.

SweatFree Communities National Organizer, Liana Foxvog, said: "I am pleased that the law requires Vermont to collaborate with other public entities to 'develop an effective strategy to monitor vendor compliance'. I hope this means that Vermont will become a founding member of the State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium."

The State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium will pool resources of public entities to investigate working conditions in factories that make uniforms and other products for public employees. Cities and states will hold vendors to the same standards, use the same independent monitor for enforcement, and create a market large enough to persuade companies to deal responsibly and ethically with their suppliers and workers. SweatFree Communities said that the states of Maine, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and the cities of Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland, Oregon, have expressed interest in joining the Consortium.

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Child Labor Education and Action (CLEA) is a partnership between School for International Training and Brattleboro Union High School (BUHS). CLEA members are high school students who advocate for human rights for child laborers and sweatshop workers. CLEA successfully made BUHS the first high school in the U.S. to join the Worker Rights Consortium, which combats sweatshops and protects the rights of workers who make apparel and other products sold in the U.S. After this victory, CLEA students led the effort to pass a strong sweatfree purchasing law in Vermont.

SweatFree Communities coordinates a national network of grassroots campaigns that promote humane working conditions in apparel and other labor-intensive global industries by working with public institutions to adopt sweatshop-free purchasing policies. Using institutional purchasing as a lever for worker justice, the sweatfree movement empowers ordinary people to create a just global economy through local action.

Reporters may contact Liana Foxvog for research on apparel companies supplying the State of Vermont.

More information:

[www.sweatfree.org/vermont](http://www.sweatfree.org/vermont)

[www.sweatfree.org/sweatfreeconsortium](http://www.sweatfree.org/sweatfreeconsortium)