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1 H.XXX

2 Introduced by the Committee on Appropriations

3 Date: February 22, 2021

4 Subject: COVID-19 relief

5 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to provide
6 COVID-19 relief to Vermont, including working families and small
7 businesses.

8 An act relating to COVID-19 Relief

9 * * * Commerce and Community Development; Targeted Business Grants * * *

10 Sec. 1. GAP ECONOMIC RECOVERY GRANTS; FISCAL YEAR 2021

11 ONE-TIME APPROPRIATION

12 (a) Appropriation.

13 (1) In fiscal year 2021, the amount of \$10,000,000.00 is appropriated
14 from the Coronavirus Relief Fund to the Agency of Commerce and
15 Community Development to provide gap economic recovery grants to eligible
16 businesses pursuant to this act.

17 (2) The Agency may use not more than five percent of the appropriated
18 funds for the costs of administration, including technical assistance and
19 guidance concerning potential eligibility for federal programs.

20 (b) Eligibility. To be eligible for a grant a business shall meet the
21 following criteria:

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1 (1) The business is domiciled or has its primary place of business in
2 Vermont.

3 (2) The business is organized and operated:

4 (A) on a for-profit basis, including a sole proprietor, partnership,
5 limited liability company, business corporation, cooperative, or mutual benefit
6 enterprise; or

7 (B) on a nonprofit or low-profit basis, including a mutual benefit
8 corporation, public benefit corporation, and a low-profit limited liability
9 company.

10 (3) The business is:

11 (A) open for business at the time of application; or

12 (B) closed for business due to the COVID-19 public health
13 emergency but has a good-faith plan for reopening.

14 (4) The business suffered an economic loss due to the COVID-19 public
15 health emergency.

16 (5) At the time the business submits its application to the Agency, the
17 business demonstrates that:

18 (A) the business has applied for the forgivable loans and grants made
19 available through the Paycheck Protection Program, the Economic Injury
20 Disaster Relief Advance program, or other COVID-19-related business
21 financial assistance programs created by, or as modified by, the Consolidated

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1 Appropriations Act of 2021, P.L. 116-260, but was denied assistance because
2 the business does not meet the eligibility criteria for any program; or

3 (B) the business has not applied for any such assistance based on a
4 determination by a financial institution or other participating lender, an
5 attorney, an accountant, or another qualified financial professional that the
6 business is not eligible for such assistance because the business does not meet
7 the eligibility criteria for any program.

8 (c) Amount of grant. A grant shall not exceed the lesser of:

9 (1) three times the eligible business’s fixed monthly expenses for
10 commercial mortgage or rent, insurance, electricity, heat, water, sewer service,
11 telecommunications service, and Internet service; or

12 (2) \$150,000.00.

13 (d) Grant administration; priorities.

14 (1) Beginning on the date the Agency begins accepting applications, for
15 an initial 30-day period, the Agency may accept applications from eligible
16 businesses but shall award grants only to eligible businesses that have not
17 received any COVID-19-related assistance from State or federal sources.

18 (2) After the initial 30-day period, the Agency shall continue to accept
19 applications and award grants consistent with the following:

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1 (A) The Agency shall give first priority to eligible businesses that
2 have not received any COVID-19-related assistance from State or federal
3 sources.

4 (B) The Agency may exercise its discretion to give subsequent
5 priority to eligible businesses based on whether and the extent to which an
6 eligible business:

7 (i) was unable to operate because of the Governor’s declared state
8 of emergency;

9 (ii) suffered an operating loss;

10 (iii) has received State or federal grants or forgivable loans;

11 (iv) will use funds to reopen or modify its operations to remain
12 open;

13 (v) will use funds to cover fixed operating expenses until the
14 Governor’s declared state of emergency is lifted; and

15 (vi) is the primary source of income for a household.

16 (e) Guidelines. Not later than 10 days after the effective date of this act,
17 the Agency shall publish guidelines governing the implementation of the
18 program, which at minimum shall:

19 (1) establish application and award procedures;

20 (2) establish standards to determine whether an eligible business has its
21 primary place of business in Vermont;

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1 CONSERVATION BOARD, HOUSING AND FACILITIES

2 The sum of \$3,000,000.00 of Coronavirus Relief Funds is appropriated to
3 the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board in fiscal year 2021, which the
4 Board shall use, in part through grants to nonprofit housing partners and
5 service organizations, for housing and facilities necessary to provide safe
6 shelter and assistance for persons who are, or are at risk of, experiencing
7 homelessness, or who have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19
8 crisis, in order to mitigate COVID-19 effects and enable compliance with
9 COVID-19 public health precautions.

10 Sec. 3. GENERAL FUND; VERMONT HOUSING AND CONSERVATION
11 BOARD

12 The sum of \$7,000,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
13 Vermont Housing and Conservation Board in fiscal year 2021 to be used for
14 affordable housing initiatives.

15 * * * Human Services, Mental Health and Health Care * * *

16 Sec. 4. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; EMERGENCY
17 OUTREACH SERVICES GRANTS

18 The sum of \$300,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
19 Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 for grants to peer-led and -
20 impacted member-led organizations for emergency outreach services to
21 address COVID-19-related needs. Of these funds, the Department shall

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1 allocate \$150,000.00 to peer-support organizations and \$150,000.00 to
2 organizations supporting the needs of LGBTQ youths.

3 Sec. 5. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; HOUSING SUPPORTS

4 The sum of \$4,000,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
5 Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 for grants to stakeholder
6 organizations to provide housing supports in community settings. The
7 Department shall give priority to proposals:

8 (1) from peer-run or peer-directed housing organizations;

9 (2) in underserved regions of the State;

10 (3) from organizations that demonstrate the greatest ability to respond
11 immediately to the need for housing supports;

12 (4) that employ or build on successful, evidence-based models of
13 supportive housing;

14 (5) that will not require additional State funds for operating costs in
15 future years or that can redirect current expenditures, or both;

16 (6) that create movement within the current system of care, such as
17 those that would move individuals out of hospitals and other restrictive settings
18 and back into a community setting; and

19 (7) that focus on equity and on providing patient-centered care.

20 Sec. 6. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; DESIGNATED AND

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1 SPECIALIZED SERVICE AGENCIES; CASE MANAGEMENT
2 SERVICES

3 The sum of \$850,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
4 Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 to provide funds to the
5 designated and specialized service agencies to enable them each to hire an
6 additional case manager to provide case management services to Vermont
7 residents who may not previously have been part of an agency’s caseload but
8 whose lives have been significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and
9 who are now urgently in need of these agencies’ supports.

10 Sec. 7. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; WORKFORCE
11 TRAINING AND WELLNESS SUPPORTS

12 The sum of \$150,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
13 Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 for training and wellness
14 supports for frontline health care workers to help them meet Vermont
15 residents’ current mental health needs, such as training for emergency
16 department personnel responding to an increased demand for crisis services as
17 a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and training on trauma-informed and
18 trauma-specific care for mental health professionals responding to the surge in
19 mental health treatment needs. These workers would also benefit from
20 wellness supports as they continue to care for people in crisis while
21 experiencing their own stress, anxiety, and trauma as a result of the pandemic.

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1 Sec. 8. SUPPORTS FOR NEW AMERICANS, REFUGEES, AND
2 IMMIGRANTS

3 The sum of \$700,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
4 Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2021 for distribution in equal
5 amounts to the Association of Africans Living in Vermont and the U.S.
6 Committee for Refugees and Immigrants’ Vermont Refugee Resettlement
7 Program for various purposes related to COVID-19, including:

8 (1) interpretation and translation services related to COVID-19, including
9 accessing testing and vaccines;

10 (2) purchasing laptops and providing digital literacy for households to
11 ensure that children can attend school remotely, that families can access
12 telehealth services, and that adult family members can find employment;

13 (3) providing case management services related to an increased need
14 related to housing assistance, workforce development, and employment
15 coaching; and

16 (4) providing navigation of Reach Up, 3SquaresVT, and other public
17 assistance programs following job losses.

18 Sec. 9. GRANTS TO REACH UP PARTICIPANTS

19 The sum of \$1,300,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
20 Department for Children and Families in fiscal year 2021 for the purposes of
21 distributing monies to families participating in the Reach Up program. These

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1 funds shall be distributed in a manner similar to the distribution funds made to
2 the population under 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 136, Sec. 15.

3 Sec. 10. VERMONT FOOD BANK

4 The sum of \$1,376,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund in fiscal
5 year 2021 to the Agency of Human Services' central office, to be granted to
6 the Vermont food bank to pay the costs of the Vermont Farmers to Families
7 Food Box Program for the months of January and February 2021.

8 Sec. 11. ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

9 The sum of \$100,000.00 is appropriated to the Department of Disabilities,
10 Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL) in fiscal year 2021 to be granted to the
11 Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired for a technology
12 training program (iPad and iPhone training) for older Vermonters who
13 experience decreased vision and blindness and others who are blind or visually
14 impaired to address social isolation resulting from social distancing.

15 Sec. 12. GREEN MOUNTAIN CARE BOARD; DEPARTMENT OF

16 HEALTH; HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES; DATA COLLECTION

17 AND ANALYSIS

18 (a) The sum of \$66,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
19 Green Mountain Care Board in fiscal year 2021 to provide the State share
20 pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 9374(h) for updates to the Vermont Healthcare Claims

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1 Uniform Reporting and Evaluation System (VHCURES) to improve data
2 collection related to health equity.

3 (b) The sum of \$134,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
4 Department of Health in fiscal year 2021 for collection and analysis of
5 demographic data, including race and ethnicity data, regarding Vermont
6 residents who experience health disparities.

7 * * * Education * * *

8 Sec. 13. SCHOOL INDOOR AIR QUALITY GRANT PROGRAM;

9 REALLOCATION

10 (a) Reallocation. In fiscal year 2021, \$15,000,000.00 in unexpended funds
11 from the amount appropriated to the Agency of Education in 2020 Acts and
12 Resolves No. 120, Sec. A.50, as amended by 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 154,
13 Sec. B.1112, for Pre-K – 12 Education Pandemic Costs shall be reallocated to
14 the School Indoor Air Quality Grant Program, established in 2020 Acts and
15 Resolves No. 120, Sec. A.51.

16 (b) Authorization. Efficiency Vermont shall require that any school that
17 receives a grant through the School Indoor Air Quality Grant Program,
18 established in 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 120, Sec. A.51, authorize Efficiency
19 Vermont to release the school name and grant amount in any report requested
20 by the General Assembly.

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1 **Sec. 14. RETIRED TEACHERS HEALTHCARE FUNDING – Language**

2 **expected**

3 * * * Public Service; Broadband * * *

4 Sec. 15. LINE EXTENSION FUNDING

5 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that \$1,000,000.00 be allocated
6 for additional financial assistance under the COVID-Response Line Extension
7 Customer Assistance Program established in 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 137,
8 Sec. 13.

9 (b) To accomplish the purpose of this section and notwithstanding any
10 other provision of law to the contrary, the Department of Public Service is
11 authorized to use \$1,000,000.00 of the unobligated balance remaining from the
12 Coronavirus Relief Funds appropriated to the Department for broadband
13 programs in Act No. 137.

14 * * * Natural Resources and Agriculture * * *

15 Sec. 16. GENERAL FUND; NATURAL RESOURCES AND

16 AGRICULTURE

17 (a) In fiscal year 2021, funds are appropriated from the General Fund as
18 follows:

19 (1) \$3,000,000.00 to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets for
20 the Working Lands Program.

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1 (2) \$10,000,000.00 to the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for the
2 following:

3 (A) \$5,000,000.00 to the Department of Forests, Parks and
4 Recreation for the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative
5 (VOREC).

6 (B) \$5,000,000.00 to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources’
7 central office for investments to improve recreational infrastructure and access
8 on State lands and to fund repairs and improvements to Vermont’s trail
9 network on both private and public land.

10 * * * Taxation; Annual Link to Federal Statutes * * *

11 Sec. 17. 32 V.S.A. § 5824 is amended to read:

12 § 5824. ADOPTION OF FEDERAL INCOME TAX LAWS

13 The statutes of the United States relating to the federal income tax, as in
14 effect on December 31, ~~2019~~ 2020, but without regard to federal income tax
15 rates under 26 U.S.C. § 1, are hereby adopted for the purpose of computing the
16 tax liability under this chapter.

17 Sec. 18. 32 V.S.A. § 7402(8) is amended to read:

18 (8) “Laws of the United States” means the U.S. Internal Revenue Code
19 of 1986, as amended through December 31, ~~2019~~ 2020. As used in this
20 chapter, “Internal Revenue Code” has the same meaning as “laws of the United
21 States” as defined in this subdivision.

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* * * Effective Dates * * *

Sec. 19. EFFECTIVE DATES

This act shall take effect on passage, except that, notwithstanding 1 V.S.A. § 214, Secs. 17 and 18 (annual link to federal statutes) shall take effect retroactively on January 1, 2021 and apply to taxable years beginning on and after January 1, 2020.