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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 General Fund to the Agency of Commerce and Community
15 Development to provide gap economic recovery grants to eligible businesses
16 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 (6) The business is in compliance with current State health and safety
9 protocols established by Executive Order.

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

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

14 (2) \$150,000.00.

15 (d) Grant administration; priorities.

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

20 (2) After the initial 30-day period, the Agency shall continue to accept
21 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 The sum of \$10,000,000.00 of Coronavirus Relief Funds is appropriated to
2 the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board in fiscal year 2021, which the
3 Board shall use, in part through grants to nonprofit housing partners and
4 service organizations, for housing and facilities necessary to provide safe
5 shelter and assistance for persons who are, or are at risk of, experiencing
6 homelessness, or who have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19
7 crisis, in order to mitigate COVID-19 effects and enable compliance with
8 COVID-19 public health precautions. Upon expenditure of the funds, the
9 Vermont Housing and Housing Conservation Board shall report to the House
10 and Senate Appropriations Committee on the specific uses of the funds
11 appropriated in this section.

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

13 Sec. 3. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; EMERGENCY
14 OUTREACH SERVICES GRANTS

15 The sum of \$300,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
16 Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 for grants to peer-led and
17 impacted member-led organizations for emergency outreach services to
18 address COVID-19-related needs. Of these funds, the Department shall
19 allocate \$150,000.00 to a mental health peer-support organization and
20 \$150,000.00 to an organization supporting the needs of LGBTQ youths.

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1 Sec. 4. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; HOUSING SUPPORTS

2 (a) The sum of \$4,000,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
3 Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 for grants to Vermont Care
4 Partners and other stakeholder organizations to provide housing supports in
5 community settings. The Department shall select the projects in consultation
6 with representatives of the designated agencies, specialized service agencies,
7 and peer organizations. The grants shall be awarded to organizations that
8 demonstrate the greatest ability to respond immediately to the need for housing
9 supports and shall be for projects that will not require additional State funds for
10 operating costs in future years or that can redirect current expenditures, or
11 both. To the greatest extent possible, grants shall be awarded for projects in
12 underserved areas of the State. At least one grant shall be awarded to a peer-
13 run or peer-directed housing organization. In addition, the Department, in
14 consultation with the designated agencies, specialized service agencies, and
15 peer organizations, shall give priority to proposed projects that meet one or
16 more of the following criteria:

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

20 (2) focus on equity and on providing patient-centered care; and

1 (3) employ or build on successful, evidence-based models of supportive
2 housing.

3 Sec. 5. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; DESIGNATED AND
4 SPECIALIZED SERVICE AGENCIES; CASE MANAGEMENT
5 SERVICES

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

13 Sec. 6. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; WORKFORCE
14 TRAINING AND WELLNESS SUPPORTS

15 The sum of \$150,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
16 Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 for training and wellness
17 supports for frontline health care workers to help them meet Vermont
18 residents’ current mental health needs, such as training for emergency
19 department personnel responding to an increased demand for crisis services as
20 a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and training on trauma-informed and
21 trauma-specific care for mental health professionals responding to the surge in

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1 mental health treatment needs. These workers would also benefit from
2 wellness supports as they continue to care for people in crisis while
3 experiencing their own stress, anxiety, and trauma as a result of the pandemic.

4 Sec. 7. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; USE OF FUNDS; REPORT

5 On or before January 15, 2022, the Department of Mental Health shall
6 report to the House Committees on Health Care and on Appropriations and the
7 Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and on Appropriations with a
8 summary of the use of the funds appropriated in Secs. 3-6 of this Act,
9 including the amounts distributed or expended under each section, to whom the
10 funds were distributed, and how the funds were used by each recipient or by
11 the Department, as applicable.

12 Sec. 8. SUPPORTS FOR NEW AMERICANS, REFUGEES, AND

13 IMMIGRANTS

14 (a) The sum of \$700,000.00 is appropriated from the Coronavirus Relief
15 Fund to the Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2021 for distribution in
16 equal amounts to the Association of Africans Living in Vermont and the U.S.
17 Committee for Refugees and Immigrants' Vermont Refugee Resettlement
18 Program for various purposes related to COVID-19, including:

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

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

4 (3) providing case management services related to an increased need
5 related to housing assistance, workforce development, and employment
6 coaching; and

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

9 (b) Upon expenditure of the funds, the Agency of Human Services shall
10 report to the House and Senate Appropriations Committee on the specific uses
11 of the funds appropriated in subsection (a).

12 Sec. 9. GRANTS TO REACH UP PARTICIPANTS

13 The sum of \$376,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund and
14 \$924,000.00 from the Coronavirus Relief Fund to the Department for Children
15 and Families in fiscal year 2021 for the purposes of distributing monies to
16 families participating in the Reach Up program. These funds shall be
17 distributed in a manner similar to the distribution funds made to the population
18 under 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 136, Sec. 15.

19 Sec. 10. VERMONT FOOD BANK

20 The sum of \$1,376,000.00 is appropriated from the Coronavirus Relief
21 Fund in fiscal year 2021 to the Agency of Human Services' central office, to

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1 be granted to the Vermont food bank to pay the costs of the Vermont Farmers
2 to Families Food Box Program for the months of January and February 2021.

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

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

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

11 HEALTH; HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES; DATA COLLECTION
12 AND ANALYSIS

13 (a) The sum of \$66,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
14 Green Mountain Care Board in fiscal year 2021 to provide the State share
15 pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 9374(h) for updates to the Vermont Healthcare Claims
16 Uniform Reporting and Evaluation System (VHCURES) to improve data
17 collection related to health equity.

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

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1 Sec. 13; and \$1,200,000.00 for the Connected Community Resiliency Planning
2 Program; and the CUD Broadband Infrastructure Program.

3 (b) To accomplish the purpose of this section and notwithstanding any
4 other provision of law to the contrary, the Department of Public Service is
5 authorized to use \$2,200,000.00 of the unobligated balance remaining from the
6 Coronavirus Relief Funds appropriated to the Department for broadband
7 programs in Act No. 137.

8 * * * Natural Resources and Agriculture * * *

9 Sec. 16. GENERAL FUND; NATURAL RESOURCES AND
10 AGRICULTURE

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

13 (1) \$3,000,000.00 to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets for
14 the Working Lands Program.

15 (2) \$10,000,000.00 to the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for the
16 following:

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

20 (B) \$5,000,000.00 to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources'
21 central office for investments to improve recreational infrastructure and access

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1 on State lands and to fund repairs and improvements to Vermont’s trail
2 network on both private and public land.

3 (3) Upon expenditure of the funds, the Agency of Natural Resources
4 shall report to the House and Senate Appropriations Committee on the specific
5 uses of the funds appropriated in subsection (2).

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

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

8 § 5824. ADOPTION OF FEDERAL INCOME TAX LAWS

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

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

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

18 * * * Effective Dates * * *

19 Sec. 19. EFFECTIVE DATES

20 This act shall take effect on passage, except that, notwithstanding 1 V.S.A.
21 § 214, Secs. 17 and 18 (annual link to federal statutes) shall take effect

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- 1 retroactively on January 1, 2021 and apply to taxable years beginning on and
- 2 after January 1, 2020.