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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

**LT. GOVERNOR MOLLY GRAY RELEASES FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STATEWIDE RECOVER STRONGER TOUR**

Montpelier, Vt.— Today, at a virtual press conference, Lt. Governor Molly Gray released a public report of her findings and recommendations from her statewide Recover Stronger listening tour. Over the past several months, Lt. Governor Gray spent a day in a different county in Vermont each week to hear directly from Vermonters on how the pandemic has impacted their businesses, families, and communities and the additional resources needed to not only recover, but also recover stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic. Vermont is set to receive \$2.7 billion in American Rescue Plan Act funds, along with funding through the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Plan.

“I heard from Vermonters from all across the state on the immense challenges they and their communities continue to face as the COVID-19 pandemic marches on. The Recover Stronger tour, my report, and today’s press conference are about elevating those experiences as well as possible solutions,” said Lt. Governor Gray, “To many Vermonters it may come as no surprise that workforce development, housing, child and family care, mental health services, and broadband access are top of mind for Vermonters. The pandemic exacerbated many of the needs we already knew were an issue for our small, rural state with an aging population.”

Lt. Governor Gray’s public report will be shared with the Governor, legislative leaders and Vermont’s Congressional delegation.

Joining the Lt. Governor today were more than 65 Vermonters whose feedback contributed to the report. Five Vermonters were invited to speak to the reports five top issue areas: workforce development, housing, child care/paid family and medical leave, mental health and high-speed internet/cellular service access.

“Shortages in the workforce have become a common denominator issue for all sectors of Vermont’s economy. As monumental as the breadth of this challenge is it requires all sectors working collaboratively and creatively to find a sustainable solution. The intersectionality of the workforce issue is undeniable. A local business employee who has to care for her mother with dementia because there are not enough staff at the long-term care center will need to reduce her hours or leave her job altogether. In some sectors, such as child care and long-term care the workforce challenges existed well before the pandemic and are now at crisis levels. Bold ideas and actions are needed,” said Molly Dugan, Director of Policy for Cathedral Square.

“Housing is out of reach for many of Vermont’s renters, and the state has been in the midst of a chronic affordable housing crisis for many, many years,” stated Kerrie Lohr, Public Relations Manager for Lamoille Housing Partnership.

While addressing child care, Claire Kendall, Co-Executive Director for the Family Center of Washington County, said, “The child care crisis we are in as a state and nation is very real. Child care programs are closing daily, weekly, struggling to survive both financially and with a shrinking workforce. Families need quality child care programs in order to work and children need quality child care environments where they can play, learn and thrive. Child care is a basic building block that makes it possible for Vermont families to work – addressing the child care crisis will allow for other staffing shortages and workforce issues to succeed.”

“The single greatest challenge currently facing children’s mental health in Vermont is the lack of trained professionals. Adequate funding is needed in order to be able to offer the salaries necessary to attract and retain qualified staff. We cannot prioritize mental health care while simultaneously devaluing the people who provide these essential services,” said Jennifer Smith, Director of Children, Youth, and Family Services for Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont.

While addressing what broadband access means to his profession and patients, Dr. Rick Hildebrandt, Chief Medical Information Officer for Rutland Regional Medical Center, said “Healthcare increasingly relies on digital technology including electronic registration, virtual “telehealth” visits, inpatient e-consults, secure physician-patient messaging, and patient portal access. Unfortunately, many of our patients, and providers, do not have a reliable broadband network to access these services. Expanding this access is necessary to deliver high-quality, cost-effective healthcare both now and in the future.”

Lt. Governor Gray summarized by saying, “With each conversation, it became abundantly clear that all of these issues - workforce development, affordable housing, accessible and affordable childcare, adequate mental health and support services, as well as universal access to broadband - are intrinsically linked.

As the oldest state in the nation, with more deaths than births, investments in these areas are not only necessary to get us out of this crisis but are critical to the future of our state. Giving working families the resources and support they need to not only survive, but thrive, requires sustained and substantial investments.”

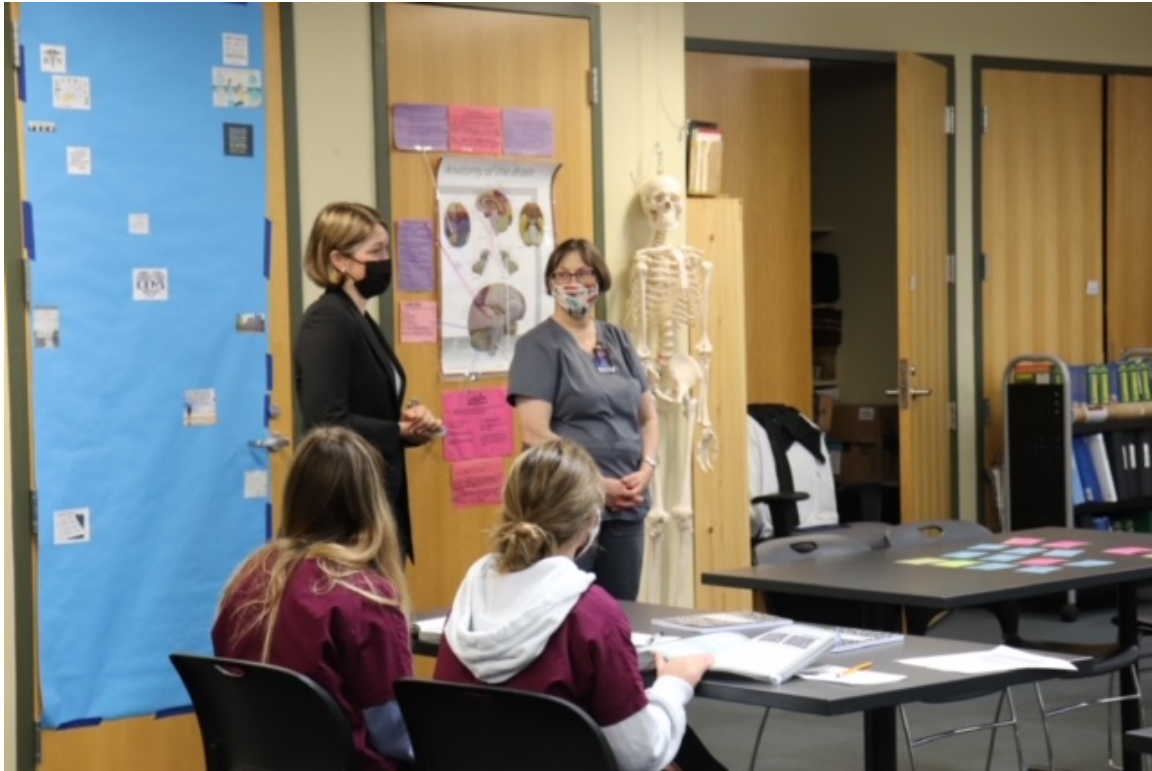
The full Recover Stronger memorandum can be read [here](#).



Brattleboro Community Conversation - September 28, 2021



Family Center of Washington County - September 14, 2021



North Country Career Center - September 10, 2021



Lamoille Housing Partnership - July 28, 2021

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