

1 H.315

2 Introduced by the Committee on Appropriations

3 Date:

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.

1 (b) Eligibility. To be eligible for a grant, a business shall meet the
2 following criteria:

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

5 (2) The business is organized and operated:

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

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

12 (3) The business is:

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

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

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

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

20 (A) the business has applied for the forgivable loans and grants made
21 available through the Paycheck Protection Program, the Economic Injury

1 Disaster Relief Advance program, or other COVID-19-related business
2 financial assistance programs created by, or as modified by, the Consolidated
3 Appropriations Act of 2021, P.L. 116-260, but was denied assistance because
4 the business does not meet the eligibility criteria for any program; or

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

10 (6) The business is in compliance with current State health and safety
11 protocols established by Executive Order.

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

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

16 (2) \$150,000.00.

17 (d) Grant administration; priorities.

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

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

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

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

9 (i) was unable to operate because of the Governor's declared state
10 of emergency;

11 (ii) suffered an operating loss;

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

13 (iv) will use funds to reopen or modify its operations to remain
14 open;

15 (v) will use funds to cover fixed operating expenses until the
16 Governor's declared state of emergency is lifted; and

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

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

21 (1) establish application and award procedures;

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

3 (3) establish standards for the use of grant funds;

4 (4) establish procedures to ensure that grant awards comply with the
5 requirements of this section and that the State maintains adequate records to
6 demonstrate compliance with this section;

7 (5) establish procedures to prevent, detect, and mitigate fraud, waste,
8 error, and abuse; and

9 (6) establish procedures to ensure that grant applicants comply with
10 State and federal employment and labor laws.

11 (f) Reporting. The Agency shall submit two reports to the House
12 Committees on Appropriations and on Commerce and Economic Development
13 and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Economic Development,
14 Housing and General Affairs detailing the implementation of this section,
15 including specific information concerning the amount, identity, and
16 demographic information of grant recipients, which shall be publicly available:

17 (1) an initial report following the 30-day approval period specified in
18 subdivision (d)(1) of this section; and

19 (2) a final report not later than 30 days after program funds are
20 exhausted.

1 allocate \$150,000.00 to a mental health peer-support organization and
2 \$150,000.00 to an organization supporting the needs of LGBTQ youths.

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

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

- 1 (2) focus on equity and on providing patient-centered care; and
2 (3) employ or build on successful, evidence-based models of supportive
3 housing.

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

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

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

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

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

5 Sec. 7. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; USE OF FUNDS;

6 REPORT

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

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

15 IMMIGRANTS

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

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

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

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

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

11 (b) Upon expenditure of the funds, the Agency of Human Services shall
12 report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations on the specific
13 uses of the funds appropriated in subsection (a) of this section.

14 Sec. 9. GRANTS TO REACH UP PARTICIPANTS

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

1 Sec. 10. VERMONT FOOD BANK

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

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

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

13 Sec. 12. GREEN MOUNTAIN CARE BOARD; DEPARTMENT OF
14 HEALTH; HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES; DATA COLLECTION
15 AND ANALYSIS

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

1 (c) Reporting. Upon expenditure of the funds, the Agency of Education
2 shall report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations on the
3 specific uses of the funds appropriated in subsection (a) of this section.

4 Sec. 14. PENSION AND OTHER POSTEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT

5 OBLIGATIONS; VERMONT STATE EMPLOYEES’

6 RETIREMENT SYSTEM; VERMONT STATE TEACHERS’

7 RETIREMENT SYSTEM; RESERVATION OF FUNDS; LONG-

8 TERM PLAN

9 (a) In fiscal year 2021, the amount of \$20,000,000.00 in General Funds is
10 hereby reserved to support pension funding initiatives and prefunding of other
11 postemployment benefits (OPEB).

12 (b) On or before May 30, 2021, the General Assembly and the
13 Administration, in collaboration with the Treasurer and interested parties, shall
14 develop a long-term plan to address pension and OPEB liabilities. The funds
15 reserved above in subsection (a) are available for an appropriation as part of
16 this plan development.

17 * * * Public Service; Broadband * * *

18 Sec. 15. LINE EXTENSION FUNDING; CONNECTED COMMUNITY

19 RESILIENCY PLANNING PROGRAM; AND

20 COMMUNICATIONS UNION DISTRICTS (CUD)

21 BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

1 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that \$1,000,000.00 be allocated
2 for additional financial assistance under the COVID-Response Line Extension
3 Customer Assistance Program established in 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 137,
4 Sec. 13 and \$1,200,000.00 for the Connected Community Resiliency Planning
5 Program and the CUD Broadband Infrastructure Program.

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

11 * * * Natural Resources and Agriculture * * *

12 Sec. 16. GENERAL FUND; NATURAL RESOURCES AND
13 AGRICULTURE

14 In fiscal year 2021, funds are appropriated from the General Fund as
15 follows:

16 (1) \$3,000,000.00 to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets for
17 the Working Lands Program.

18 (2) \$10,000,000.00 to the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for the
19 following:

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

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

8 (3) Upon expenditure of the funds, the Agency of Natural Resources
9 shall report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations on the
10 specific uses of the funds appropriated in subdivision (2) of this section.

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

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

13 § 5824. ADOPTION OF FEDERAL INCOME TAX LAWS

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

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

19 (8) "Laws of the United States" means the U.S. Internal Revenue Code
20 of 1986, as amended through December 31, ~~2019~~ 2020. As used in this

1 chapter, “Internal Revenue Code” has the same meaning as “laws of the United
2 States” as defined in this subdivision.

3 * * * Effective Dates * * *

4 Sec. 19. EFFECTIVE DATES

5 This act shall take effect on passage, except that, notwithstanding 1 V.S.A.
6 § 214, Secs. 17 and 18 (annual link to federal statutes) shall take effect
7 retroactively on January 1, 2021 and apply to taxable years beginning on and
8 after January 1, 2020.