

* * * Workforce and Economic Development Policies (H.484) * * *

Sec. F.1 DEPARTMENT OF LABOR; WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT;

ALLOCATION OF FUNDS

(a) Of the \$1,500,000 appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Labor in 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 183, Sec. 5a., \$1,200,000 is reverted to the General Fund in fiscal year 2024 and allocated as follows:

(1) \$200,000 to the State Workforce Development Board for the New American Labor Force Program as appropriated in Sec. B.1100 (q).

(2) \$1,000,000 to provide services through the Work-Based Learning and Training Program pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 547 as appropriated in Sec. B.100(q).

Sec. F.2 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 183, Sec. 51a is amended to read:

Sec. 51a. COVID-19-RELATED PAID LEAVE GRANT PROGRAM

(a) Establishment and appropriation.

(1) There is established in the Department of Financial Regulation the COVID-19-Related Paid Leave Grant Program to administer and award grants to employers to reimburse the cost of providing COVID-19-related paid leave to employees as provided in subsection (e) of this section.

(2) The sum of ~~\$15,180,000~~ \$5,000,000 is appropriated from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds to the Department of Financial Regulation for fiscal years 2023 and 2024 for the provision of grants to reimburse employers for the cost of providing COVID-19-related paid leave. ~~Not more than seven percent of the amount appropriated pursuant to this subdivision may be used for expenses related to Program administration and outreach.~~

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(c) Grant program.

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(3)(A) Employers may submit applications for grants during the period beginning on October 1, 2022 and ending on September 30, 2023 and may submit an application not more than once each calendar quarter during that period. Grant applications shall be submitted for paid leave provided during the preceding calendar quarter and, subject to subdivision (B) of this subdivision (3), for calendar quarters in the program period prior to the preceding calendar quarter.

(B) An employer shall be permitted to request grant funds for costs related to COVID-19-related paid leave described in subsection (e) of this section in a calendar quarter prior to the preceding calendar quarter if:

(i) the employer has not already received grant funds in relation to the COVID-19-related leave; and

(ii) the costs of the COVID-19-related leave are eligible for a grant pursuant to the provisions of this section and any applicable federal requirements.

(4) An employer may combine grant funds with funding from other sources but shall not use grant funds from multiple sources for the same instance of paid leave provided to its employees for COVID-19-related reasons. As used in this subdivision, an “instance” means a calendar day in which the employee was absent from work for a COVID-19-related reason.

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(6) Grants shall be awarded to eligible employers on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to available funding.

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(e) Amount of grants.

(1) Employers may, subject to the limitations of subdivision (2) of this subsection (e), apply for grants to ~~either~~ reimburse the cost of COVID-19-related paid leave provided to employees ~~or to provide funds to be used to pay the cost to retroactively provide paid leave to employees who took unpaid leave for COVID-19 related reasons.~~

~~(A) For reimbursement of COVID-19 related paid leave that was already provided, the employer may, subject to the limitations of subdivision (2) of this subsection (e), apply for a grant in an amount equal to the number of hours of COVID-19-related paid leave provided to each employee multiplied by the greater of either the minimum wage established pursuant to 21 V.S.A. § 384 or the employee's regular hourly wage.~~

~~(B) For COVID-19 related paid leave that will be provided retroactively to employees who took unpaid leave for COVID-19 related reasons, the employer may, subject to the limitations of subdivision (2) of this subsection (e), apply for a grant in an amount equal to the number of hours of COVID-19 related paid leave to be provided to each employee multiplied by the greater of either the minimum wage established pursuant to 21 V.S.A. § 384 or the employee's regular hourly wage.~~

Sec. F.3 16 V.S.A. chapter 87, subchapter 6 is added to read:

Subchapter 6. Forgivable Loan Incentive Programs

§ 2871. VERMONT TEACHER FORGIVABLE LOAN INCENTIVE

PROGRAM

(a) As used in this section:

(1) “Corporation” means the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation established in section 2821 of this title.

(2) “Eligible individual” means an individual who satisfies the eligibility requirements under this section for a forgivable loan.

(3) “Eligible school” means an approved postsecondary education institution as defined under section 2822 of this title.

(4) “Forgivable loan” means a loan awarded under this section covering tuition, which may also include room, board, and the cost of required books and supplies for up to full-time attendance in an undergraduate or graduate program at an eligible school.

(5) “Program” means the Vermont Teacher Forgivable Loan Incentive Program created under this section.

(b) The Vermont Teacher Forgivable Loan Incentive Program is created and shall be administered by the Corporation. The Program provides forgivable loans to students enrolled in an eligible school who commit to working as a teacher in a Vermont public school and who meet the eligibility requirements in subsection (d) of this section. The intent of the Program is to encourage students to enter into teaching professions, with an emphasis on encouraging Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color Vermonters, New Americans, and other historically underrepresented communities in an effort to diversify the educator workforce.

(c) The Corporation shall disburse forgivable loan funds under the Program on behalf of eligible individuals, subject to the appropriation of funds by the General Assembly for this purpose.

(d) To be eligible for a forgivable loan under the Program, an individual, whether a resident or nonresident of Vermont, shall satisfy all of the following requirements:

(1) be enrolled in teaching program at an eligible school;

(2) maintain good standing at the eligible school at which the individual is enrolled;

(3) agree to work as a teacher in Vermont employed directly by a public school located in Vermont for a minimum of one year following licensure for each year of forgivable loan awarded;

(4) have executed a credit agreement or promissory note that will reduce the individual's forgivable loan benefit, in whole or in part, pursuant to subsection (f) of this section, if the individual fails to complete the period of service required in this subsection;

(5) have completed the Program's application form, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and for Vermont residents, the Vermont grant application each academic year of enrollment in accordance with a schedule determined by the Corporation; and

(6) have provided such other documentation as the Corporation may require.

(e) If an eligible individual fails to serve as a teacher in a Vermont public school for a period that would entitle the individual to the full forgivable loan benefit received by the individual, other than for good cause as determined by the Corporation, then the

individual shall receive only partial loan forgiveness for a pro rata portion of the loan pursuant to the terms of the interest-free credit agreement or promissory note signed by the individual at the time of entering the Program.

(f) There shall be no deadline to apply for a forgivable loan under this section.

Forgivable loans shall be awarded on a rolling basis as long as funds are available, and any funds remaining at the end of a fiscal year shall roll over and shall be available to the Corporation in the following fiscal year to award additional forgivable loans as set forth in this section.

(g) The Corporation shall adopt policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary to implement the provisions of this section, including maximum forgivable loan amounts. The Corporation shall not use more than seven percent of the funds appropriated for the Program for its costs of administration and may recoup its reasonable costs of collecting the forgivable loans in repayment.

Sec. F.4 EMERGING PATHWAYS TO TEACHING; REPORT

(a) Purpose. The purpose of this section is to encourage and support the development and retention of qualified and effective Vermont educators. To combat the growing educator shortage throughout the State and meet the needs of Vermont students, it is necessary to invest in nontraditional educator training programs.

(b) Grant program.

(1) Program creation. In fiscal year 2024, there is established the Emerging Pathways Grant Program, to be administered by the Agency of Education, to provide grants to expand support, mentoring, and professional development to prospective educators seeking licensure through the Agency of Education's emerging pathways,

including peer review and apprentice pathways, with the goal of increased program completion rates and increased rates of licensure of underrepresented demographics.

(2) Program administration. The Agency shall adopt policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary for implementation of the Program described in subdivision (1) of this subsection.

(3) Eligibility criteria. The Agency shall issue grants to organizations, school districts, or a group of school districts for the development and administration of programs and program coordinators designed to provide prospective educators in emerging pathways to teaching with the support necessary for successful entry into the educator workforce. Recruitment, support, and retention of prospective educator candidates shall focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Support provided through the Program may include:

(A) support through the Praxis exam process;

(B) local, educator-led seminars designed around the Vermont licensure portfolio themes;

(C) local educator mentors;

(D) support in completing the peer review portfolio and licensing process; and

(E) continued professional development support within the first year of licensure.

(4) Report. On or before January 15, 2024, the Agency of Education shall report to the Senate and House Committees on Education on the status of the implementation of the Emerging Pathways Grant Program and a summary and performance review of the programs to which grants were awarded. The report shall include any metrics used in the

performance review, the number of program participants, endorsement areas of participants, feedback from participants and mentors, and any recommendation for legislative action.

Sec. F.5 TEACHER LICENSING FEES; SUSPENSION

(a) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, peer review process one-time licensure fee requirements under 16 V.S.A. § 1697(a)(7) are suspended during fiscal years 2024 through 2029.

(b) In fiscal year 2024, the estimated fees that would have been collected under 16 V.S.A. § 1697(a)(7) shall be accounted for through funds appropriated to the Agency of Education from the General Fund.

Sec. F.6 EDUCATOR WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

(a) Educator demographics. In order to understand and improve the longstanding and well-documented issue of underrepresentation in the Vermont educator workforce, including underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color; New Americans; and other historically underrepresented communities, the Agency of Education shall collect demographic information from educators and report such information in its annual teacher and staff full-time equivalencies report. The Agency shall submit the educator demographic information section of the report annually to the General Assembly on or before each January 15.

(b) Historically Underrepresented Educator Affinity Groups Grant Program.

(1) There is created the Historically Underrepresented Educator Affinity Groups Grant Program for the purpose of providing grants for the support of existing and the

development of new educator affinity groups for historically underrepresented groups.

The Agency of Education shall administer the Program.

(2) The Agency shall adopt policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary for the implementation of the Program established pursuant to this subsection (b).

Sec. F.7 DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONAL

DEVELOPMENT; INTENT; CONTRACT

(a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to assist the Department of Corrections to continue and further engage in a professional development initiative to enhance supervisory effectiveness and strengthen leadership development within the Department and among its employees. The Department's enhanced supervisory training is part of its effort to address an employee workforce crisis and strengthen workplace satisfaction.

(b) The Department of Corrections shall contract or expand an existing contract with a vendor to provide supervisory and management professional development services to the Department and among its employees.

(c) On or before March 15, 2024, the Department and the contracted vendor shall testify before the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions about the progress and effectiveness of its professional development initiative. The Department shall make management, supervisory, and frontline staff available to testify.

Sec. F.8 28 V.S.A. § 126 is added to read:

§ 126. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS; PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM;

CONFIDENTIALITY

(a) As used in this section:

(1) "Department" has the same meaning as in subdivision 3(4) of this title.

(2) “Participant” means a Department staff member who has been involved in a traumatic incident by reason of employment at the Department and who has agreed to participate in the Department’s peer support program.

(3) “Peer support” means appropriate support and services offered by a peer support specialist to a participant.

(4) “Peer support program” means a program established by the Department of Corrections to provide appropriate peer support services to Department staff members.

(5) “Peer support session” means a peer support program session for a Department staff member who has been involved in a traumatic incident by reason of employment at the Department or related to other personal matters.

(6) “Peer support specialist” means a Department staff member who, by reason of the staff member’s prior experience, training, or interest, has expressed a desire and has been selected to provide appropriate peer support services to a participant.

(7) “Staff member” means a supervising officer as defined in subdivision 3(9) of this title, a correctional officer as defined in subdivision 3(10) of this title, and any other employee of the Department.

(b)(1) Except as provided in subsection (d) of this section, any communication made by a participant or peer support specialist in a peer support session of the peer support program, including any oral or written information conveyed during a peer support session, shall not be disclosed by any individual participating in the peer support session.

(2) Except as provided by subsection (d) of this section, any communication relating to a peer support session between peer support specialists, between peer support specialists and participants of the peer support program, between participants of the peer

support program, or between any other Department staff member, including any oral or written information, shall not be disclosed by any individual participating in the communication.

(3) Written communications described in this subsection, such as notes, records, and reports related to a peer support session, are exempt from public inspection and copying under the Public Records Act and shall be kept confidential. The Public Records Act exemptions created in this section shall not be subject to the provisions of 1 V.S.A. § 317(e) (repeal of Public Records Act exemptions).

(c) Except as provided by subsection (d) of this section, any communication made by a participant or peer support specialist in a peer support session, including any oral or written communication, such as notes, records, and reports related to the peer support session, shall not be admissible in a judicial, administrative, or arbitration proceeding. Limitations on disclosure imposed by this subsection include disclosure during any discovery conducted as part of an adjudicatory proceeding. Limitations on disclosure imposed by this subsection shall not include knowledge acquired by the Department or staff members from observations made during the course of employment or information acquired by the by the Department or staff members during the course of employment that is otherwise subject to discovery or introduction into evidence.

(d)(1) Confidentiality protections described in subsections (b) and (c) of this section shall only apply to a peer support session conducted by an individual who has:

(A) been designated by the Department or the peer support program to act as a peer support specialist; and

(B) received and completed training in peer support and providing emotional and moral support to Department staff members who have been involved in emotionally traumatic incidents by reason of their employment or other personal matters.

(2) Confidentiality protections described in subsections (b) and (c) of this section shall not apply to the following information as it pertains to an individual designated to receive such information in the normal course the individual's professional responsibilities:

(A) any threat of suicide or homicide made by a participant of a peer support session or any information conveyed in a peer support session relating to a threat of suicide or homicide;

(B) any information relating to the abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or other information that is required to be reported by law;

(C) any admission of criminal conduct; or

(D) any admission of a plan to commit a crime.

(e) Nothing in this section shall prohibit any communications between peer support specialists regarding a peer support session or between peer support specialists and participants of the peer support program.

(f)(1) The Department shall not be liable for any disclosure made in violation of this section by a peer support specialist or participant who participates in a peer support session.

(2) A peer support specialist who in good faith provides appropriate peer support services to a participant of the peer support program shall be immune from criminal or

civil liability for any injury to the participant unless the peer support specialist's conduct constitutes gross negligence, recklessness, or intentional misconduct.

Sec. F.9 CLIMATE WORKFORCE EDUCATION CAMPAIGN;

ADVANCE VERMONT

(a) Advance Vermont shall create a climate workforce-focused digital public resource that engages current and prospective employees, Vermont youth, adults interested in changing careers, and individuals yet to earn a postsecondary credential, or those who are looking to upskill.

(b) The resource shall include:

(1) centralized information about career and education opportunities in Vermont that build awareness of needed climate careers; and

(2) video series and other media featuring opportunities with employers and employee success stories.

Sec. F.10 VERMONT SUSTAINABLE JOBS FUND; BUSINESS

COACHING

(a) The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund shall recruit a cohort of up to twelve existing companies and a cohort of up to twelve trained tradespeople to receive advanced business assistance to enable them to either pivot their existing business or start a new business that will expand the State's ability to deploy renewable energy and efficiency technologies to more homes and businesses across the State.

Sec. F.11 VERMONT STATE COLLEGES; VERMONT POLICE

ACADEMY; STUDY

(a) On or before January 15, 2024, the Vermont Criminal Justice Council and representatives of the Vermont State Colleges and other public and private postsecondary institutions that offer a degree program in criminal justice shall review, consider, and take steps necessary to standardize the curricula offered and avoid redundant requirements for obtaining certification by prospective criminal justice personnel and shall submit a report of its actions to the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs.

Sec. F.12 VERMONT STATE COLLEGES; CERTIFICATE IN 3-D

TECHNOLOGY

(a) The Vermont State Colleges shall establish a Certificate in 3-D Technology program offered as a full-time, six-week, intensive residential summer program at Vermont State University, which will:

(1) offer knowledge and hands-on experience that appeals to a wide range of interests from science and engineering to the arts and humanities;

(2) position students for greater success in college and with an employable edge upon completion;

(3) attract diverse types of learners from high schools and CTE centers;

(4) foster interest in STE(A)M with learners across different disciplines;

(5) leverage the latest 3-D technology available at the Advanced Manufacturing Center; and

(6) build local and national awareness of the Vermont State College System's innovative, experiential learning methodology and technical expertise.

Sec. F.13 CREDENTIAL OF VALUE GOAL; PUBLIC-PRIVATE

PARTNERSHIP; REPORT

(a) Advance Vermont shall continue work pursuant to 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 183, Sec. 39 in support of the State’s goal articulated in 10 V.S.A. § 546 that 70 percent of working-age Vermonters hold a credential of value by 2025.

(b) On or before December 15, 2023, Advance Vermont shall report to the House and Senate committees of jurisdiction regarding the use of grant funds received from the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation in fiscal year 2024, activities performed, and outcomes achieved pursuant to this section.

Sec. F.14 18 V.S.A. § 39 is added to read:

§ 39. VERMONT PSYCHIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH NURSE

PRACTITIONER FORGIVABLE LOAN INCENTIVE PROGRAM

(a) As used in this section:

(1) “Corporation” means the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation established in 16 V.S.A. § 2821.

(2) “Eligible individual” means an individual who satisfies the eligibility requirements under this section for a forgivable loan.

(3) “Eligible school” means an approved postsecondary education institution, as defined under 16 V.S.A. § 2822.

(4) “Forgivable loan” means a loan awarded under this section covering tuition, which may also cover room, board, and the cost of required books and supplies for up to full-time attendance at an eligible school.

(5) “Program” means the Vermont Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Forgivable Loan Incentive Program created under this section.

(b) The Vermont Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Forgivable Loan Incentive Program is created and shall be administered by the Department of Health in collaboration with the Corporation. The Program provides forgivable loans to students enrolled in a master's program at an eligible school who commit to working as a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner in this State and who meet the eligibility requirements in subsection (d) of this section.

(c) The Corporation shall disburse forgivable loan funds under the Program on behalf of eligible individuals, subject to the appropriation of funds by the General Assembly for this purpose.

(d) To be eligible for a forgivable loan under the Program, an individual, whether a resident or nonresident, shall satisfy all of the following requirements:

(1) be enrolled at an eligible school in a program, whether through in-person or remote instruction, that leads to a master's degree or specialty in psychiatric mental health;

(2) maintain good standing at the eligible school at which the individual is enrolled;

(3) agree to work as a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner in Vermont for a minimum of one year following licensure for each year of forgivable loan awarded;

(4) have executed a credit agreement or promissory note that will reduce the individual's forgivable loan benefit, in whole or in part, pursuant to subsection (f) of this section, if the individual fails to complete the period of service required in subdivision (3) of this subsection;

(5) have completed the Program's application form and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), in accordance with a schedule determined by the Corporation; and

(6) have provided such other documentation as the Corporation may require.

(e) If an eligible individual fails to serve as a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner in this State in compliance with the Program for a period that would entitle the individual to the full forgivable loan benefit received by the individual, other than for good cause as determined by the Corporation in consultation with the Vermont Department of Health, then the individual shall receive only partial loan forgiveness for a pro rata portion of the loan pursuant to the terms of the interest-free reimbursement promissory note signed by the individual at the time of entering the Program.

(f) The Corporation shall adopt policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary to implement the provisions of this section, including maximum forgivable loan amounts.

Sec. F.15 AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES; DESIGNATED AND
SPECIALIZED SERVICE AGENCIES; WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT

(a) Of the funds appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Human Services in this act, \$3,000,000 shall be distributed to the designated and specialized service agencies equitably based on each agency's proportion of full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff to the total number of FTE staff across all designated and specialized service agencies statewide.

(b)(1) Each designated and specialized service agency shall make the funds received pursuant to subsection (a) of this section available to its current and prospective

employees on a rolling basis in exchange for a one-year service obligation to work at a designated or specialized service agency in this State.

(2) The funds may be used for the following purposes:

(A) student loan repayment; and

(B) tuition assistance.

(3) Loan repayment and tuition assistance funds shall be in the form of forgivable loans, with the debt forgiven upon the employee's completion of the required service obligation.

(c) On or before March 1, 2024, the Agency of Human Services shall make a presentation available to the House Committees on Appropriations, on Health Care, and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare on the use of the funds appropriated in this section.

Sec. F.16 18 V.S.A. § 40 is added to read:

§ 40. VERMONT DENTAL HYGIENIST FORGIVABLE LOAN

INCENTIVE PROGRAM

(a) As used in this section:

(1) "Corporation" means the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation established in 16 V.S.A. § 2821.

(2) "Eligible individual" means an individual who satisfies the eligibility requirements under this section for a forgivable loan.

(3) "Eligible school" means an approved postsecondary education institution, as defined under 16 V.S.A. § 2822.

(4) “Forgivable loan” means a loan awarded under this section covering tuition, which may also include room, board, and the cost of required books and supplies for up to full-time attendance at an eligible school.

(5) “Program” means the Vermont Dental Hygienist Forgivable Loan Incentive Program created under this section.

(b) The Vermont Dental Hygienist Forgivable Loan Incentive Program is created and shall be administered by the Department of Health in collaboration with the Corporation. The Program provides forgivable loans to students enrolled in an eligible school who commit to working as a dental hygienist in this State and who meet the eligibility requirements in subsection (d) of this section.

(c) The Corporation shall disburse forgivable loan funds under the Program on behalf of eligible individuals, subject to the appropriation of funds by the General Assembly for this purpose.

(d) To be eligible for a forgivable loan under the Program, an individual, whether a resident or nonresident, shall satisfy all of the following requirements:

(1) be enrolled at a dental hygienist program at an eligible school;

(2) maintain good standing at the eligible school at which the individual is enrolled;

(3) agree to work as a dental hygienist in Vermont for a minimum of one year following licensure for each year of forgivable loan awarded;

(4) have executed a credit agreement or promissory note that will reduce the individual’s forgivable loan benefit, in whole or in part, pursuant to subsection (g) of this

section, if the individual fails to complete the period of service required in this subsection;

(5) have completed the Program's application form, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and the Vermont grant application each academic year of enrollment in accordance with a schedule determined by the Corporation; and

(6) have provided such other documentation as the Corporation may require.

(e) If an eligible individual fails to serve as a dental hygienist in this State for a period that would entitle the individual to the full forgivable loan benefit received by the individual, other than for good cause as determined by the Corporation in consultation with the Vermont Department of Health, then the individual shall receive only partial loan forgiveness for a pro rata portion of the loan pursuant to the terms of the interest-free credit agreement or promissory note signed by the individual at the time of entering the Program.

(f) There shall be no deadline to apply for a forgivable loan under this section. Forgivable loans shall be awarded on a rolling basis as long as funds are available, and any funds remaining at the end of a fiscal year shall roll over and shall be available to the Department of Health and the Corporation in the following fiscal year to award additional forgivable loans as set forth in this section.

(g) The Corporation shall adopt policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary to implement the provisions of this section, including maximum forgivable loan amounts.

Sec. F.17 10 V.S.A. § 2 is added to read:

§ 2. SMALL BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXCHANGE

(a) There is created the Small Business Technical Assistance Exchange, a business assistance program through which the regional development corporations shall provide small- and mid-sized businesses with professional and technical assistance:

(1) through in-house Business Navigators;

(2) through partnerships with organizations specializing in outreach to mature workers, youth, individuals with disabilities, individuals who have been involved with the correction system, Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color Vermonters, New Americans, and other historically marginalized populations; and

(3) through grants to private providers for professional services, including:

(A) business operations, financial management, and grant writing;

(B) digital strategies;

(C) architecture and physical space design;

(D) reconfiguring manufacturing equipment and processes and incorporating safety measures;

(E) technology and software consulting;

(F) legal and other professional services; and

(G) other technical assistance.

(b)(1) Through the Exchange, the regional development corporations shall maintain a directory of, and build connections to, Vermont technical assistance providers who have demonstrated the ability and expertise to assist businesses with critical tools to grow and adapt their businesses to the ever-changing business climate.

(2) The Exchange shall award technical assistance grants of not more than \$5,000 per business for technical services from approved providers.

(3) To be eligible to receive technical assistance through the Exchange, a business:

(A) must be a for-profit entity located in Vermont; and

(B) must have at least \$5,000 in average annual revenue.

(4) A business whose owner's income is higher than the federal labor market area in which the business operates, as evidenced by a self-attestation provided by the owner, shall provide a 50 percent match for the costs of professional services funded by a grant.

(c) The regional development corporations shall:

(1) operate the Exchange to produce benefits for both the client companies as well as the vendors providing the assistance;

(2) conduct outreach and direct engagement to promote participation by businesses in rural areas of this State and businesses owned by mature workers, youth, individuals with disabilities, individuals who have been involved with the correction system, Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color Vermonters, New Americans, and other historically marginalized populations; and

(3) supporting businesses in anticipating and addressing changing workforce needs and availability through creative solutions, including split shifts, shorter workweeks, and cross training.

(d) The regional development corporations shall publish a report on the activities and performance of the Exchange on or before January 15 and July 15 each year.

Sec. F.18 BROWNFIELDS FUNDING; USE IN FISCAL YEAR 2024

(a) The Department of Economic Development shall use the \$8,000,000 appropriated in fiscal year 2024 for brownfields redevelopment for the remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites to be used in the same manner as the Brownfields Revitalization Fund

established by 10 V.S.A. § 6654 except, notwithstanding the grant limitations in 10 V.S.A. § 6654, projects supported by this appropriation shall not be limited to a maximum amount per site. The Agency of Commerce and Community Development shall award the amount of \$1,000,000 in fiscal year 2024 to regional planning commissions for the purposes of brownfields assessment. In awarding funds under this section, the Secretary, in consultation with the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, shall select one regional planning commission to administer these funds. To ensure statewide availability, the selected regional planning commission shall subgrant to regional planning commissions with brownfield programs, with not more than 10 percent of the funds being used for administrative purposes.

Sec. F.19 10 V.S.A. § 6654(e) is amended to read:

- (e) A grant may be awarded by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development with the approval of the Secretary of Natural Resources, provided that:
- (1) A grant may not exceed \$50,000 for characterization and assessment of a site.
 - (2) A grant may not exceed ~~\$200,000~~ \$500,000 for remediation of a site.
 - (3) A grant may be used by an applicant to purchase environmental insurance relating to the performance of the characterization, assessment, or remediation of a Brownfield site in accordance with a corrective action plan approved by the Secretary of Natural Resources.
 - (4) Financial assistance may be provided to applicants by developing a risk sharing pool, an indemnity pool, or other insurance mechanism designed to help applicants.
 - (5) All reports generated by financial assistance from the Brownfield Revitalization Fund, including site assessments, site investigations, feasibility studies,

corrective action plans, and completion reports shall be provided as hard copies to the Secretaries of Commerce and Community Development and of Natural Resources.

Sec. F.20 10 V.S.A. § 4 is amended to read:

§ 4. NEW RELOCATING EMPLOYEE INCENTIVES

* * *

(e) As used in this section:

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(2) “Relocating employee” means an individual who meets the following criteria:

(A)(i) ~~On or after July 1, 2021~~ the individual is a new relocating employee who meets the following criteria:

(I) the individual becomes a full-time resident of this State;

(II) the individual becomes a full-time employee at a Vermont location of a for-profit or nonprofit business organization domiciled or authorized to do business in this State, or of a State, municipal, or other public sector employer; and

(III) the employer attests to the Agency that, after reasonable time and effort, the employer was unable to fill the employee’s position from among Vermont applicants; or

(ii) ~~on or after February 1, 2022~~ the individual is a new remote employee who meets the following criteria:

(I) the individual becomes a full-time resident of this State; and

(II) the individual is a full-time employee of an out-of-state business and performs the majority of ~~his or her~~ the employee’s employment duties remotely from a home office or a co-working space located in this State.

(B) The individual receives gross salary or wages that equal or exceed the Vermont livable wage rate calculated pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 526.

(C) The individual is subject to Vermont income tax.

* * * Economic Development;

Community Recovery and Revitalization Grant Program * * *

Sec. F.21 2021 Acts and Resolves No. 74, Sec. H.18, as amended by 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 183, Sec. 46, is further amended to read:

Sec. H.18. COMMUNITY RECOVERY AND REVITALIZATION
GRANT PROGRAM

* * *

(b) Eligible applicants.

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(3) The following are ineligible to apply for a grant:

(A) a State or local government-operated business, except when a municipality applies for a grant for a privately-operated business providing public water supply or wastewater treatment services to the municipality;

(B) a business that, together with any affiliated business, owns or operates more than 20 locations, regardless of whether those locations do business under the same name or within the same industry; and

(C) a publicly traded company.

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Sec. F.22 10 V.S.A. § 6 is added to read:

§ 6. RURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM

(a) Creation; purpose.

(1) A Rural Industry Development Grant Program is created within the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to provide grant funding through local development corporations for business relocation and expansion efforts, including the purchase, demolition, and renovation of property for industrial use.

(2)(A) There is established a Rural Industry Development Special Fund comprising amounts appropriated to the Fund, contributions from other sources, and the return of principal from the sale of any property invested through the Program.

(B) Monies in the Fund shall be available to Agency to make grants through the Program to assist local development corporations with business relocation and expansion efforts throughout Vermont.

(C) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, interest earned and any remaining balance at the end of the fiscal year shall be retained by the Fund and carried forward in the Fund.

(b) Grant considerations. In making grant awards, the Agency shall consider:

(1) the real estate needs of growing and relocating businesses, including nonprofit organizations, in the applicant's region;

(2) the ability of the proposed project to meet the site-specific needs of businesses considering whether to expand or locate in this State;

(3) the funding that the applicant has identified, or secured, to leverage a grant award; and

(4) the readiness of an applicant to move a project forward.

(c) Eligible applicants; priority.

(1) To be eligible for a grant, an applicant must be a local development corporation, as defined in subdivision 212(10) of this title, located within this State.

(2) The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development may designate projects and agreements as first priority based on rural communities that continue to experience insufficient economic and grand list growth.

(d) Eligible activities. A grant recipient may use funding for the following:

(1) to purchase land for potential industrial use;

(2) for the costs of site development, permitting, or providing infrastructure for property the recipient owns;

(3) for the equity investment required for a loan transaction through the Vermont Economic Development Authority under 10 V.S.A. chapter 12, subchapter 3; or

(4) for the matching requirement of another State or federal grant consistent with this section.

(e) Application; market assessment.

(1) An applicant shall include in its application a local and regional market assessment that demonstrates reasonable need for the proposed development and identifies imminent, potential, or existing business growth opportunities.

(2) An applicant shall submit the following to demonstrate a readiness to begin and complete the proposed project:

(A) community and regional support for the project;

(B) that grant funding is needed to complete the proposed project;

(C) an ability to manage the project, with requisite experience and a plan for fiscal viability; and

(D) a description of the permitting required to proceed with the project and a plan for obtaining the permits.

(f) Awards; amount.

(1) An award shall not exceed the lesser of \$1,000,000 or 20 percent of the total project cost.

(2) A recipient may combine grant funds with funding from other sources.

(3) The Agency shall release grant funds upon determining that the applicant has met all application conditions and requirements.

(4) A grant recipient may apply for additional grant funds if future amounts are appropriated for the Program and the funds are for a separate but eligible use.

(g) Deed restrictions; property sales. The Agency shall include deed restrictions that require the return of the principal amount of the grant to the Special Fund and may require the payment of a percentage of the sales profit.

Sec. F.23 24 V.S.A. § 2799 is amended to read:

§ 2799. BETTER PLACES PROGRAM; CROWD GRANTING

(a)(1) There is created the Better Places Program within the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Better Places Fund, which the Department shall manage pursuant to 32 V.S.A. chapter 7, subchapter 5.

(2) The purpose of the Program is to utilize crowdfunding to spark community revitalization through collaborative grantmaking for projects that create, activate, or revitalize public spaces.

(3) The Department may administer the Program in coordination with and support from other State agencies and nonprofit and philanthropic partners.

(b) The Fund is composed of the following:

- (1) State or federal funds appropriated by the General Assembly;
- (2) gifts, grants, or other contributions to the Fund; and
- (3) any interest earned by the Fund.

(c) As used in this section, “public space” means an area or place that is open and accessible to all people with no charge for admission and includes village greens, squares, parks, community centers, town halls, libraries, and other publicly accessible buildings and connecting spaces such as sidewalks, streets, alleys, and trails.

(d)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall establish an application process, eligibility criteria, and criteria for prioritizing assistance for awarding grants through the Program.

(2) The Department may award a grant to a municipality, a nonprofit organization, or a community group with a fiscal sponsor for a project that is located in or serves a designated downtown, village center, new town center, or neighborhood development area that will create a new public space or revitalize or activate an existing public space.

(3) The Department may award a grant to not more than ~~one project~~ three projects per calendar year within a municipality.

(4) The minimum amount of a grant award is \$5,000, and the maximum amount of a grant award is \$40,000.

(5) The Department shall develop matching grant eligibility requirements to ensure a broad base of community and financial support for the project, subject to the following:

(A) A project shall include in-kind support and matching funds raised through a crowdfunding approach that includes multiple donors.

(B) An applicant may not donate to its own crowdfunding campaign.

(C) A donor may not contribute more than \$10,000 or 35 percent of the campaign goal, whichever is less.

(D) An applicant shall provide matching funds raised through crowdfunding of not less than 33 percent of the grant award.

(e) The Department of Housing and Community Development, with the assistance of a fiscal agent, shall distribute funds under this section in a manner that provides funding for projects of various sizes in as many geographical areas of the State as possible.

(f) The Department of Housing and Community Development may use up to 15 percent of any appropriation to the Fund from the General Fund to assist with crowdfunding, administration, training, and technological needs of the Program.

Sec. F.24 24 V.S.A. § 2792(d) is amended to read:

(d) The Department shall provide staff and administrative support to the State Board, ~~and~~ shall produce guidelines to direct municipalities seeking to obtain designation under this chapter, and shall pay per diem compensation for board members pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1010(b).

Sec. F.25 24 V.S.A. § 2793(b) is amended to read:

(b) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed application, the State Board shall designate a downtown development district if the State Board finds in its written decision that the municipality has:

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Sec. F.26 24 V.S.A. § 2793a(b) is amended to read:

(b) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed application, the State Board shall designate a village center if the State Board finds the applicant has met the requirements of subsection (a) of this section.

Sec. F.27 24 V.S.A. § 2793b(b) is amended to read:

(b) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed application, the State Board shall designate a new town center development district if the State Board finds, with respect to that district, the municipality has:

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Sec. F.28 24 V.S.A. § 2793e(d) is amended to read:

(d) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed application, for designation of a neighborhood development area, the State Board, after opportunity for public comment, shall approve a neighborhood development area if the Board determines that the applicant has met the requirements of this section.

Sec. F.29 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 196, Sec. 1, as amended by 2019 Acts and Resolves No. 80, Sec. 13, is further amended to read:

Sec. 1. SIMPLIFYING GOVERNMENT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

(a) The Secretary of ~~State~~ Digital Services shall serve as the chair of a steering committee, composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development, the Secretary of Administration, and the Secretary of Digital Services or their designees.

(b) The ~~Secretary of State, in collaboration with the~~ steering committee, and in collaboration with other State agencies and departments and interested stakeholders as ~~necessary~~, shall:

(1) review and consider the necessary procedural and substantive steps to enhance the Secretary of State's one-stop business portal for businesses, entrepreneurs, and citizens to provide information about starting and operating a business in Vermont; and

(2) submit on or before December 15, ~~2019~~ 2023:

(A) a design proposal that includes a project scope, timeline, roadmap, and cost projections;

(B) any statutory or regulatory changes needed to implement the proposal; and

(C) a sustainable funding model for the portal.

(c) The steering committee shall evaluate the cost and efficacy, and integrate into the current one-stop portal to the extent feasible, features that:

(1) enhance State websites to simplify registrations and provide a ~~clear~~ comprehensive, one-stop compilation of other State business requirements, including permits and licenses;

(2) implement a data collection component that offers the registrant the option to self-identify, and make available to the public through the business search function, demographic information concerning ownership of the business, including whether the business is woman-owned, veteran-owned, BIPOC-owned, LGBTQ-owned, or minority-owned;

~~(3)~~ (3) simplify the mechanism for making payments to the State by allowing a person to pay amounts ~~he or she~~ the person owes to the State for taxes, fees, or other charges to a single recipient within State government;

~~(3)~~(4) simplify annual filing requirements by allowing a person to make a single filing to a single recipient within State government and check a box if nothing substantive has changed from the prior year;

~~(4)~~(5) provide guidance, assistance with navigation, and other support to persons who are forming or operating a small business;

~~(5)~~(6) after registration, provide information about additional and ongoing State requirements and a point of contact to discuss questions or explore any assistance needed;

~~(6)~~(7) provide guidance and information about State and federal programs and initiatives, as well as State partner organizations and Vermont-based businesses of interest; and

~~(7)~~(8) map communication channels for project updates, including digital channels such as e-mail, social media, and other communications.

(d) All State agencies and departments shall designate a single employee or team of employees who are charged with the duty to provide assistance to the steering committee upon its request.

(e) The steering committee shall focus its review on providing services through the one-stop business portal primarily for the benefit of businesses with 20 or fewer employees.

(f) The Agency of Digital Services shall assign a project manager or business analyst to report directly to the Secretary of State to assist with the implementation of this act

through June 30, ~~2020~~ 2025 for the purpose of developing and implementing a one-stop navigable portal for businesses, entrepreneurs, and citizens to access information about starting a business in Vermont, and to provide ongoing support to businesses interfacing with State government.