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Gov. Shumlin outlines anti-poverty initiatives

MONTPELIER – Gov. Peter Shumlin today outlined proposals to ensure the effective use of programs that move people out of poverty in Vermont, including significant, targeted investments of both state and federal money in key areas.

With federal spending on programs for the needy continuing to fall short of demand, Gov. Shumlin said Vermont must work even harder to be effective in its use of state money to address poverty so vulnerable Vermonters get what they need.

“At their best, our anti-poverty and housing programs make sure that all Vermonters have food and shelter, as well as the help, education and training to find good jobs,” he said. “All of us need help in different ways and at different times in our lives. Together we will make sure the programs we support for these efforts are successful and productive.”

The Governor was joined at a news conference to announce the package by Agency of Human Services Secretary Doug Racine, Commissioner Dave Yacovone of the Department for Children and Families, and by a wide-ranging group of anti-poverty advocates, service providers, and others who will form a new Governor’s Council on Pathways Out of Poverty to help his Administration make programs more effective.

“I appreciate that Governor Shumlin has listened to the ideas and concerns of a wide range of professionals who are dedicated to improving the lives of Vermonters in need,” said Linda Ryan, executive director of Samaritan House, Inc. in St. Albans who has agreed to serve as co-chair of the new Council. “The Governor challenged us to make recommendations regarding how state funds could be used most effectively to combat poverty in Vermont, and we are very pleased that some of our early recommendations have gained his support.”

“It is important in a time of difficult budgets that we carefully and thoughtfully invest where it makes the most sense to lessen poverty in Vermont,” Secretary Racine said. “The programs and initiatives we are supporting in this proposed budget have a proven track record to back up their effectiveness.”

Among the efforts that will be included in the balanced budget which Gov. Shumlin will propose to lawmakers in January will be a series of initiatives aimed at those goals.

- A doubling of the Vermont Rental Subsidy program which helps provide support to families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless as they move to permanent housing to roughly \$1 million total.
- An increase of \$300,000 in state funding to the Emergency Solutions Grants that help support emergency shelters. Those programs were facing a loss of \$200,000 due to federal sequestration cuts, and the additional \$100,000 will increase seasonal capacity in shelters.
- An increase of \$200,000 in Family Supportive Housing, which provides case management and aid to homeless families as they find housing.
- Increases to child care providers, including an \$800,000 boost to STARS providers who provide the highest quality care in the state and an update of the federal poverty level on which payment for child care are calculated.

- An additional \$650,000 for substance abuse and mental health treatment services for ReachUp recipients, the top recommendation of the recently completed the legislatively-directed Reach Up Policy Workgroup. (When matched with \$576,197 in federal funding the total will be \$1,226,197.)

Those state dollars proposed in the Governor's budget are in addition to the recently-awarded early childhood education Race to the Top Grant. Included in that grant, which will overall provide nearly \$37 million to Vermont, are several elements designed to help the children of low-income Vermonters.

- Roughly \$259,625 (increasing to a total of \$1.6 million over 4 years) to expand the state's Strengthening Families program.
- Nearly \$332,207 a year for the Vermont Department of Health and the Department for Children and Families to increase Home Visiting for pre-natal and post-natal households across more of the state.
- Nearly \$475,000 a year (increasing to over \$6.4 million over four years) for Promise Communities Grants to meet locally identified needs to ensure that children develop their potential in stable and supportive environments.

Gov. Shumlin said that he will work with lawmakers on these and other budget items aimed at moving people out of poverty during the upcoming legislative session.

"We have seen continued economic difficulties faced by too many Vermont families. Therefore, we must redouble our commitment to invest our limited state dollars in those efforts that work best," he said. "This package of carefully targeted spending does just that. I am grateful to those who have agreed to serve on my Council and who have been instrumental in bringing these proposals to us. I strongly believe they will help us bend the curve on poverty in Vermont, for the greater economic benefit of us all."