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APPROPRIATIONS

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**MEMORANDUM**

To: Rep. Helen Head, Chair, House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs

From: Rep. Mitzi Johnson, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

Date: February 2, 2016

Subject: Provisions in the Governor's Proposed FY 2017 Budget

The House Appropriations Committee has started work on the Governor's proposed FY 2017 Budget and would like to inform you about proposals that fall under the jurisdiction of the Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs.

The House Appropriations Committee welcomes and appreciates your input and would like to give you the opportunity to comment on the proposals below. If you would like to respond it would be helpful if you could do so by the end of the day on February 24th.

**Sec. D.100** APPROPRIATIONS; PROPERTY TRANSFER TAX

(a) This act contains the following amounts appropriated from special funds that receive revenue from the property transfer tax. Expenditures from these appropriations shall not exceed available revenues.

(1) The sum of \$518,000 is appropriated from the Property Valuation and Review Administration Special Fund to the Department of Taxes for administration of the Use Tax Reimbursement Program. Notwithstanding 32 V.S.A. § 9610(c), amounts above \$518,000 from the property transfer tax that are deposited into the Property Valuation and Review Administration Special Fund shall be transferred into the General Fund.

(2) The sum of \$11,304,840 is appropriated from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. Notwithstanding 10 V.S.A. § 312, amounts above \$11,304,840 from the property transfer tax that are deposited into the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund shall be transferred into the General Fund.

(3) The sum of \$3,760,599 is appropriated from the Municipal and Regional Planning Fund. Notwithstanding 24 V.S.A. § 4306(a), amounts above \$3,760,599 from the property transfer tax that are deposited into the Municipal and Regional Planning Fund shall be transferred into the General Fund. The \$3,760,599 shall be allocated as follows:

(A) \$2,924,417 for disbursement to regional planning commissions in a manner consistent with 24 V.S.A. § 4306(b);

(B) \$457,482 for disbursement to municipalities in a manner consistent with 24 V.S.A. § 4306(b);

(C) \$378,700 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for the Vermont Center for Geographic Information.

**EXPLANATION:** The 1/19/2016 consensus FY 2017 revenue forecast of \$39.5m for the Property Transfer Tax (PTT) is being allocated as follows: The Department of Taxes will receive \$518K for property valuation and review administrative costs (including computerization of the current use program). The HCT will receive \$11,304,840 in PTT revenue to maintain level funding over FY 2016. The PTT appropriation to the Municipal & Regional Planning Fund is \$3,760,599, which maintains level funding for the appropriations to Regional Planning Commissions and Municipal Planning Commissions from FY 2016 funding levels. The appropriation to Geographic Information Systems is level funded from FY 2016.

### **Sec. E.321** HOUSING ASSISTANCE BENEFITS; FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM

(a) For State fiscal year 2017, the Agency of Human Services may continue a housing assistance program within the General Assistance program to create flexibility to provide these General Assistance benefits. The purpose of the program is to mitigate poverty and serve applicants more effectively than they are currently being served with General Assistance funds. The program shall operate in a consistent manner within existing statutes and rules and policies effective on July 1, 2013, and any succeeding amendments thereto, and may create programs and provide services consistent with these policies. Eligible activities shall include, among others, the provision of shelter, overflow shelter, case management, transitional housing, deposits, down payments, rental assistance, upstream prevention, and related services that ensure that all Vermonters have access to shelter, housing, and the services they need to become safely housed. The Agency may award grants to homeless and housing service providers for eligible activities. The assistance provided under this section is not an entitlement and may be discontinued when the appropriation has been fully spent.

(b) The program may operate in up to 12 districts designated by the Secretary of Human Services. The Agency shall establish goals and procedures for evaluating the program overall, including performance measures that demonstrate program results, and for each district in which the Agency operates the program, it shall establish procedures for evaluating the district program and its effects.

(c) The Agency shall continue to engage interested parties, including both statewide organizations and local agencies, in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the General Assistance flexibility program.

**EXPLANATION:** Same language as 2015 Act 58 Sec. E.321; this language allows DCF to continue to fund programs and issue grants to serve clients with housing needs.

### **Sec. E.321.1** GENERAL ASSISTANCE HOUSING

(a) Funds appropriated to the Agency of Human Services in the General Assistance program in fiscal year 2017 may be used for temporary housing in catastrophic situations and for vulnerable populations, as defined in rules adopted by the Agency. The cold weather exception policy issued by the Department for Children and Families' Economic Services Division dated October 25, 2012, and any succeeding amendments to it, shall remain in effect.

**EXPLANATION:** Same language as 2015 Act 58 Sec. E.321.1. This language authorizes the General Assistance program to continue the cold weather exception policy. This language also

ensures that when the cold weather exception policy does not apply, the adopted administrative rules still apply and have the force and effect of law.

**Sec. E.321.2** 2013 Acts and Resolves No. 50, Sec. E.321.2(c) is amended to read:

(c) On or before ~~January 31~~ and July 31 of each year beginning in ~~2015~~ 2016, the Agency of Human Services shall report statewide statistics related to the use of emergency housing vouchers during the preceding calendar half-year, including demographic information, deidentified client data, shelter and motel usage rates, clients' primary stated cause of homelessness, average lengths of stay in emergency housing by demographic group and by type of housing, and such other relevant data as the Secretary deems appropriate. When the General Assembly is in session, the Agency shall provide its report to the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs, the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs, and the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. When the General Assembly is not in session, the Agency shall provide its report to the Joint Fiscal Committee.

**EXPLANATION:** Recommendation to provide one annual General Assistance report per year, on July 31, which we believe will provide a better picture of the overall program.

**Sec. E.324 LIHEAP AND WEATHERIZATION**

(a) Notwithstanding 33 V.S.A. §§ 2603 and 2501, in fiscal year 2017, the Secretary of Administration may, upon recommendation of the Secretary of Human Services, transfer up to 15 percent of the federal fiscal year 2017 federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) block grant from the federal funds appropriation in Sec. B.324 of this act to the Home Weatherization Assistance appropriation in Sec. B.326 of this act to be used for weatherization in State fiscal year 2017. An equivalent appropriation transfer shall be made to Sec. B.324 of this act, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, from the Home Weatherization Assistance Fund in Sec. B.326 of this act to provide home heating fuel benefits in State fiscal year 2017. At least three days prior to any such transfer being made, the Secretary of Administration shall report the intended transfer to the Joint Fiscal Office and shall report any completed transfers to the Joint Fiscal Committee at its next meeting.

**EXPLANATION:** The FY17 budget only includes federal funds for LIHEAP; this language allows DCF to meet costs that are solely state funded to cover benefits for recipients over 150 percent of the federal poverty limit as well as administration costs in excess of ten percent of the federal award.

**Sec. E.325** Department for children and families – office of economic opportunity

(a) Of the General Fund appropriation in Sec. B.325 of this act, \$1,092,000 shall be granted to community agencies for homeless assistance by preserving existing services, increasing services, or increasing resources available statewide. These funds may be granted alone or in conjunction with federal Emergency Solutions Grants funds. Grant decisions shall be made with assistance from the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness.

**EXPLANATION:** Annual language, included in 2015 Act 58 Sec. E.325.