



March 27, 2018

Memorandum

To: Members of the House Agriculture and Forestry Committee

From: Jen Hollar

Subject: S.276 – An Act Relating to Rural Economic Development

Cc: Gus Seelig and Ela Chapin

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Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning. Due to the many pieces moving between S.276 and other agriculture and forestry bill, I am summarizing my testimony in writing for your reference.

VHCB respectfully requests that the committee:

- 1) Support Section 1 of S.276 as passed by the Senate. It refines the Rural Economic Development Initiative created within VHCB by the legislature last year at 10 V.S.A. § 325m. The changes reflect the experience of the program thus far, the amount of funding provided (\$75,000 in FY18) and a desire to eliminate overlap with the responsibilities of other state and regional entities.
- 2) Add a section to S.276 updating the authorizing statute for VHCB's Viability Program at 6 V.S.A. § 4710. The statute has not been changed since the program was created 15 years ago. We propose updating to reflect current practice including our work with the forestry sector. The attached language is supported by the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets and the Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation. The Senate Agriculture Committee included it as Section 6 in its version of H.904. The language can be found on today's Senate Calendar on page 1436 [here](#). It follows and essentially comprises these changes.
  - a. Updates the name to the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program and includes references to the forest sector throughout.
  - b. Expands the advisory board by two members - the commissioner of forest, parks and recreation and an individual with expertise in agricultural or forest-sector economics, financing for business development.
  - c. Eliminates an unused special fund within the Ag Agency.



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Please let us know what other information would be helpful to the committee and thank you for your consideration.