

VLIAC Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council

“Celebrating 47 years of representing the interest of low income Vermonters”

First we want to thank you for your continued work during economic and health crisis. We greatly appreciate what this Legislature and the State has done to respond to the COVID pandemic in targeting the most pressing needs, in all sectors with the Coronavirus Relief Funds and the Quarter 1 Budget. We know you will continue to address the neediest among us, and begin to restore some stability and opportunity for all Vermonters.

Working families, low income Vermonters, those with disabilities, elders, and those economically disadvantaged to begin with, have been hit especially hard ever since the COVID pandemic hit.

Before COVID hit more than 25% of Vermont households were one layoff or a serious medical incident away from falling below the poverty line. Reach up families, often on the verge of crisis, are at risk of eviction, loss of their transportation, utility shutoffs, and so on.

A number of the recovery CRF programs are not available to the poorest Vermonters. Many low income working Vermonters have lost their jobs, or remain on the front lines, but are ineligible to collect hazard pay.

Those families with disabilities have struggled with access to food and services, and a series of difficulties to having meaningful participation in remote learning at schools.

We support a number of the programs that have provided relief during this crisis and we support maintaining and increasing funding for the safety net programs, and those programs that offer opportunities for recovery.

Hopefully some new federal aid with a loosening of restrictions and a longer time to use these funds will be forthcoming, because we all know that many of these impacts are going to continue well past December 30th when the Cares funding must be spent or is already gone. To the extent we can - we should try to continue our support for these proven relief efforts below that also offer opportunities to recover and do things differently in the long term.

LOW INCOME ECONOMIC PROGRAMS

Please continue to fund the Micro Business Development and the VT Matched Saving and Financial Capabilities. These programs stabilize families, create jobs and income and help develop lifelong financial skills and build assets - and have done so for many years in the State. They are more important now than ever as low income Vermonters have lost jobs, closed businesses, and have depleted any resources.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR REACH-UP FAMILIES

Please support Reach-Up families with direct payments from the \$2 million dollars of CRF already allocated for grants to vulnerable populations, and if there is unspent CRF funds please increase direct assistance to the neediest Vermonters.

CHILDCARE

Vermont has done a good job in keeping transmission rates down and supporting childcare care providers and parents in the state, but we must continue to expand the availability of safe and affordable childcare if people are going to be able to be back at work.

HOUSING AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Please continue to fund housing and rental assistance programs that make payments to landlords on behalf of tenant to avoid evictions and prevent homelessness and to VT Legal Aid to provide legal and counseling services for those who are, or at risk of, experiencing homelessness and for access to justice services.

ACCESS TO FOOD AND SERVICES

Continue to support the efforts and the innovative programs of many Vermont communities, organizations, volunteers that have risen to the task to make, distribute, and deliver food and meals to hungry Vermonters in their homes and provide access to groceries.

SCHOOLS REOPENING AND REMOTE LEARNING EQUITY

The COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted the need for internet access both in Broadband and equipment for all Vermont children to continue their education remotely, but especially for economically challenged families and those with disabilities. There continues to be difficulties in addressing children with special needs both remotely and in considering the reopening of schools.

HAZARD PAY AND UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Many working Vermonters are on the front lines serving the public in jobs that are ineligible for hazard pay under the federal guidelines for acceptable use of Coronavirus Relief Funds. This is unfortunate, as those folks are often the lowest paid workers without any benefits. Their stimulus checks are long gone and the prospects for staying healthy, finding affordable childcare, and being able to support their families is not very positive. And there are many more Vermonters that are unemployed with benefits shrinking as the crisis continue. We must support these working families with continuing benefits.

Thank you for your good work and attention to the most vulnerable Vermonters.

Sincerely,
Karen Lafayette, VLIAC Legislative Liaison