

1 Sec. 1. ECONOMIC RELIEF FOR BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS;
2 CORONAVIRUS RELIEF FUND; APPROPRIATIONS

3 (a) Determination of necessity due to COVID-19. The General Assembly
4 determines that the expenditure of monies from the Coronavirus Relief Fund
5 pursuant to this section is necessary to provide support to individuals and
6 businesses that have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19 crisis.

7 (b) Appropriations. The following amounts are appropriated from the
8 Coronavirus Relief Fund to the named recipients for the purpose specified:

9 (1) \$5,000,000 to the Working Lands Enterprise Fund for grants to
10 businesses within the agricultural, food and forest, and wood products
11 industries.

12 (A) The Working Lands Enterprise Board shall award grants to
13 provide assistance for:

14 (i) recovering from verifiable losses incurred due to the COVID-
15 19 crisis; and

16 (ii) developing new products or markets necessary for the
17 sustainable viability of the business because of changes in the supply chain and
18 relevant markets due to the COVID-19 crisis.

19 (B) The Board shall not award grants to businesses in the dairy sector
20 that are eligible for other assistance from the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

1 (2) \$5,000,000 to the Vermont Community Loan Fund, of which the
2 Fund shall allocate \$2,500,000 to issue grants of not more than \$10,000 to
3 woman-owned businesses and \$2,500,000 to issue grants of not more than
4 \$10,000 to minority-owned businesses.

5 (A) The Agency of Commerce and Community Development shall

6 (i) design a grant application;

7 (ii) provide notice to applicants concerning allowable expenditures
8 under the CARES Act;

9 (iii) host an online application process; and

10 (iv) support outreach efforts through media outlets.

11 (B) The Vermont Commission on Women and a host nonprofit that
12 works with minority businesses shall conduct outreach within their respective
13 business communities and provide support for applicants as they research and
14 apply for the grants.

15 (C) If any funds remain unspent on September 1, 2020, the Agency
16 and the Fund shall assess the participation rates in the grant programs and
17 reallocate funds as is necessary.

18 (3) \$3,000,000 to the Agency for Commerce and Community
19 Development for grants to businesses that provide highway and bridge
20 maintenance services for the Agency of Transportation or municipal highway
21 departments, or both.

1 (4) \$3,000,000 to the Department of Tourism and Marketing to provide
2 marketing support to businesses recovering from the COVID-19 crisis.

3 (5) \$1,400,000 to the Office of Economic Opportunity for funding to the
4 Community Action Agencies to provide grants of not more than \$5,000, to
5 provide technical assistance, and for the costs of administration, which may
6 include the creation of a statewide centralized online HUB and funding for
7 new micro-business counselors and a statewide coordinator.

8 (A) A disadvantaged micro-business, which means a business with
9 five or fewer employees and whose owner earns not more than 80 percent of
10 the State median income, is eligible for assistance if the business was out of
11 operation for not less than one month or lost 50 percent of expected revenue
12 due to the COVID-19 crisis.

13 (B) An individual is eligible for assistance if the individual has
14 become unemployed or underemployed due to the COVID-19 crisis and
15 requires economic support to start a new micro-business.

16 (6) \$3,400,000 to the Agency of Commerce and Community
17 Development to establish a Restart Vermont Technical Support Network to
18 make available an appropriate level of professional assistance to businesses to
19 enable them to re-emerge from the COVID-19 emergency in a viable way.

20 (A) The Agency shall issue a request for proposals to service
21 providers to establish a group of Recovery Navigators qualified to provide

1 businesses with assistance in revising business models, business and financial
2 planning, and grant and loan writing support.

3 (B) The request for proposals issued by the Agency shall solicit
4 service providers adequately demonstrating their qualifications in areas
5 including:

6 (i) operational expertise and ability in helping businesses
7 modernize current operating practices;

8 (ii) knowledge and experience in developing digital strategies for
9 retailers needing to establish a more robust and competitive online presence;

10 (iii) architecture and physical space design for optimal flow in
11 restaurants adjusting their model and space to accommodate more takeout and
12 less seating, space for meal preparation, and food delivery logistics;

13 (iv) reconfiguration of manufacturing equipment and processes to
14 enable production of Personal Protective Equipment, as well as
15 accommodation of safety measures resulting from the COVID-19 emergency;

16 (v) technology or software consulting to agricultural producers
17 and manufacturers on the utilization of technology to solve problems; and

18 (vi) legal and other professional services experienced in helping
19 businesses develop turnaround plans, including restructuring debt,

20 prioritization of payables, and orderly unwinding businesses.

1 (7) \$1,000,000 to the Department of Housing and Community
2 Development for grants to communities through the Better Places Program to
3 purchase or lease equipment, including masks, sanitizing stations, hands free
4 door pulls, outdoor tables and chairs, and other items used towards public
5 safety measures and the mitigation of the spread of COVID-19, while enabling
6 local businesses and organizations to reopen.

7 (8) \$64,600,000 to the Agency of Commerce and Community
8 Development, in consultation with the Department of Taxes, and with approval
9 of the Joint Fiscal Committee, to allocate for additional emergency economic
10 recovery grants pursuant to Secs. 2–3 of S.350 (2020), as enacted.

11 (A) The Agency and Department shall consider whether applicants
12 must demonstrate a 50 percent or greater reduction in revenue in a monthly or
13 quarterly period from March 1, 2020 to September 1, 2020 as compared to the
14 same period in 2019.

15 (B) The Agency and Department shall allocate not less than
16 \$10,000,000 for grants to nonprofit organizations.

17 (9) \$1,500,000 to the Agency of Natural Resources for grants through
18 the Outdoor Recreation Business Assistance Program.

19 (10) \$100,000 to Vermont Public Radio and \$100,000 to Vermont
20 Public Television.

1 (11) \$5,000,000 to the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund to implement a
2 Restaurants Feeding the Hungry Initiative.

3 (c) Administration of funds. A recipient of an appropriation to administer
4 grants and other assistance in this section:

5 (1) may use not more than six percent of the funds for the cost of
6 administration;

7 (2) shall require a recipient of a grant to attest to the intended use of the
8 grant award; and

9 (3) shall disclose to applicants that all expenditures of funding from the
10 Coronavirus Relief Fund are subject to audit by the State and may be recovered
11 by the State if the recipient uses the funding for an illegible purpose under the
12 CARES Act.

13 Sec. 2. OUTDOOR RECREATION BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM;

14 COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

15 (a) Purpose. The purpose of this section is to provide financial assistance
16 to outdoor recreation businesses in the State to assist with compliance with or
17 implementation of COVID-19 public health precautions.

18 (b) Definitions. As used in this section:

19 (1) “Outdoor recreation business” means any person conducting a
20 business or a service within the State that offers outdoor recreation as the
21 principle part of the business or service, including outdoor outfitters, fishing

1 guides, snowmobile tours, ski tours, and other eligible activities approved by
2 the Secretary. An “outdoor recreation business” includes for-profit businesses,
3 not-for-profit businesses, and charitable organizations organized under 26
4 U.S.C. § 501(c)(3).

5 (2) “Secretary” means the Secretary of Natural Resources.

6 (c) Program establishment.

7 (1) The Secretary shall establish an Outdoor Recreation Business
8 Assistance Program (Program) to provide grants to outdoor recreation
9 businesses for costs or expenses necessary to comply with or implement
10 COVID-19 public health precautions, including costs or expenses related to
11 one or more of the following:

12 (A) cleaning or disinfection services or equipment;

13 (B) personal protection equipment for staff, customers, or
14 participants;

15 (C) symptom monitoring or diagnosis to ensure safe participation by
16 customers or participants;

17 (D) signage or informational material to inform staff, customers, and
18 participants of necessary public health precautions;

19 (E) temporary staff housing necessary to maintain public health
20 precautions;

1 (F) maintenance or repair of trails where damage is caused by
2 increased usage during the declared COVID-19 public health emergency; and

3 (G) other improvements necessary to address public safety needs due
4 to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

5 (2) In order to qualify for assistance under the Program, an outdoor
6 recreation business shall:

7 (A) be currently operating or providing services; and

8 (B) accurately demonstrate to the Secretary or the Secretary's
9 designee eligible costs or expenses that the outdoor recreation business
10 incurred or will incur on or after March 1, 2020 and before December 20,
11 2020.

12 (e) Implementation and administration.

13 (1) The Secretary shall administer the Program and may implement the
14 Program by:

15 (A) contracting with an independent public or private entity;

16 (B) contracting for or hiring up to two temporary positions at the
17 Agency of Natural Resources; or

18 (C) reallocating existing Agency of Natural Resources staff positions
19 to work exclusively on the Program or other CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136
20 eligible activities.

21 (2) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the Secretary

1 may enter into a contract with an independent public or private entity as
2 authorized under this section without the need to competitively bid the
3 contract. For the purposes of the Program, the public health risk posed by
4 COVID-19 shall be deemed to be an emergency situation that justifies the
5 execution of a sole source contract pursuant to Bulletin 3.5, the State’s
6 Procurement and Contracting Procedures.

7 (e) Application; processing.

8 (1) The Secretary or the Secretary’s designee shall create an application
9 form that outdoor recreation businesses shall utilize when applying for an
10 award. Applicants shall certify that all information they provide is truthful and
11 accurate to the best of their knowledge, information, and belief.

12 (2) The Secretary or the Secretary’s designee shall, based on the amount
13 of cost or expense documented by the outdoor recreation business on the date
14 the application is received, provide up to the maximum award authorized under
15 this section. Applications shall be processed in the order received, but an
16 application shall not be ready for evaluation until the Secretary or the
17 Secretary’s designee determines that the application is administratively
18 complete and includes required proof of costs or expenses incurred in response
19 to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

20 (3) Once an outdoor recreation business submits a complete application
21 and demonstrates eligible costs or expenses, the Secretary or the Secretary’s

1 designee shall promptly issue a payment, provided that the appropriated funds
2 have not been expended. The last payment may be a partial payment
3 consisting of the remaining available funds.

4 (4) Each award under this section shall be a direct payment from the
5 State of Vermont to an eligible outdoor recreation business. Outdoor
6 recreation businesses shall not submit more than one application.

7 (f) Payment; maximum. The maximum amount of an award that may be
8 awarded under this section shall be \$30,000.00.

9 (g) Program terms and limitations.

10 (1) The Secretary shall attempt to award grants equitably on a
11 geographic basis across the State. After equity of geographic distribution is
12 accounted for, grant payments under the Program shall be issued on a first-
13 come, first-served basis until all funds are awarded or December 20, 2020,
14 whichever occurs first, provided that the costs or expenses are incurred and the
15 funds fully expended on or before December 30, 2020.

16 (2) The name of an outdoor recreation business that receives an award
17 under the Program and the amount of the award are public records subject to
18 inspection and copying under the Public Records Act.

19 (3) Any application documents of an outdoor recreation business
20 containing federal identification numbers and sales amounts are subject to the

1 confidentiality provisions of 32 V.S.A. § 3102 and are return information
2 under that section.

3 (4) Data submitted by an outdoor recreation business under this section
4 to demonstrate costs or expenses shall be a trade secret exempt from public
5 inspection and copying under 1 V.S.A. § 317(c)(9), provided that the Secretary
6 may use and disclose submitted information in summary or aggregated form
7 that does not directly or indirectly identify an outdoor recreation business.

8 Sec. 3. 24 V.S.A. § 2799 is added to read:

9 § 2799. BETTER PLACES PROGRAM; CROWD GRANTING

10 (a)(1) There is created a Better Places Fund under 32 V.S.A. chapter 7,
11 subchapter 5.

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

15 (3) The Department of Housing and Community Development may
16 administer the Fund in coordination with and support from other State agencies
17 and nonprofit and philanthropic partners.

18 (b) The Fund is composed of the following:

19 (1) State or federal funds appropriated by the General Assembly;

20 (2) gifts, grants, or other contributions to the Fund;

21 (3) proceeds from the issuance of general obligation bonds; and

1 (4) any interest earned by the Fund.

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

7 (d)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall
8 establish an application process, eligibility criteria, and criteria for prioritizing
9 assistance for awarding grants from the Fund.

10 (2) The Department may award a grant to a municipality or nonprofit
11 organization for a project that is located in a designated downtown, village
12 center, new town center, or neighborhood development area that will create a
13 new public space or revitalize or activate an existing public space.

14 (3) The Department may develop matching grant eligibility
15 requirements, such as requiring that to be eligible for a grant, a project shall
16 use matching funds raised through a crowdfunding approach that includes
17 multiple donors and other appropriate requirements to ensure a broad base of
18 community and financial support for the project.

19 (e) The Department of Housing and Community Development, with the
20 assistance of a fiscal agent, shall distribute funds under this section in a manner

1 that provides funding for projects of various sizes in as many geographical
2 areas of the State as possible.

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

7 (g) Beginning on January 15, 2021, and annually thereafter, the Department
8 of Housing and Community Development shall submit to the Senate
9 Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs and the
10 House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development an annual report
11 regarding the activities and progress of the Better Places program. The report
12 shall:

13 (1) summarize the program activities in the preceding year, and report on
14 the number of awarded grants and the total grant funds allocated;

15 (2) report on partner resources and contributions to the program; and

16 (3) report on any measurable economic activity that may include number of
17 jobs created, number of visitors, the approximate number of square feet to be
18 activated or redeveloped, and the number of volunteers engaged in the project.

19 * * * Workers' Compensation Administration Fund * * *

20 Sec. 4. WORKERS' COMPENSATION RATE OF CONTRIBUTION

1 For fiscal year 2021, after consideration of the formula in 21 V.S.A.
2 § 711(b) and historical rate trends, the General Assembly determines that the
3 rate of contribution for the direct calendar year premium for workers’
4 compensation insurance shall remain at the rate of 1.4 percent. The
5 contribution rate for self-insured workers’ compensation losses and workers’
6 compensation losses of corporations approved under 21 V.S.A. chapter 9 shall
7 remain at one percent.