

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Government Operations to which was referred Senate
3 Bill No. 349 entitled “An act relating to emergency funding for local
4 government” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and
5 recommends that the House propose to the Senate that the bill be amended as
6 follows:

7 First: In Sec. 1, COVID-19 expense reimbursement; local government, in
8 subsection (a), after “In fiscal year 2020,” by striking out “\$16,000,000.00”
9 and inserting in lieu thereof “\$5,200,000.00”

10 Second: In Sec. 1, COVID-19 expense reimbursement; local government,
11 in subsection (b), after “units of local government.” by inserting “In
12 determining the allocation of reimbursements under this section, the Secretary
13 may prioritize need, including the local unemployment rate and the percent of
14 eligible COVID-19 expenses relative to the total budget.”

15 Third: In Sec. 1, COVID-19 expense reimbursement; local government, in
16 subdivisions (c)(1) and (c)(2) in their entirety and inserting in lieu thereof new
17 subdivisions (c)(1) and (c)(2) to read:

18 (1) \$4,850,000.00 in grants that shall not exceed \$200,000.00 per
19 recipient for reimbursement of eligible COVID-19 expenses to the following:

1 (A) Vermont counties in amounts that shall not exceed \$1.00 per
2 person as determined from the 2019 town census data published by the U.S.
3 Census Bureau; and

4 (B) Vermont cities, towns, unorganized towns or gores, and any of
5 the unified towns and gores of Essex County including those incurred by
6 incorporated villages, fire districts, consolidated water districts created under
7 24 V.S.A. chapter 91, and consolidated sewer districts created under 24 V.S.A.
8 chapter 105 therein. Grants allocated under this subdivision (c)(1)(B) shall not
9 exceed \$20.00 per person as determined from the 2019 town census data
10 published by the U.S. Census Bureau.

11 (2) \$200,000.00 to solid waste management districts organized under 24
12 V.S.A. chapter 121 in grants for reimbursement of eligible COVID-19
13 expenses. The Secretary or designee may determine any limitations to the
14 amount of the grants allocated under this subdivision.

15 Fourth: In Sec. 1, COVID-19 expense reimbursement; local government,
16 subdivision (c)(4) (proration of grants), after “grants may be prorated” by
17 inserting “and the Secretary or designee shall prioritize grants to municipalities
18 with populations under 2,500”

19 Fifth: By inserting before the reader heading new Secs. 2–4 to read as
20 follows:

21 Sec. 2. DEFINITIONS

1 (1) “CARES Act” means the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic
2 Security Act, Pub. L. No.116–136, as amended, and any guidance and
3 regulations issued under that act.

4 (2) “Municipality” means a city, town, or incorporated village.

5 (3) “Eligible use” means a use of grant funds permitted under the
6 CARES Act to assist a municipality in digitizing land records for **online** public
7 access during municipal office closures due to the COVID-19 public health
8 emergency.

9 Sec. 3. CORONAVIRUS MUNICIPAL RECORDS DIGITIZATION

10 GRANTS; AGENCY OF ADMINISTRATION

11 (a) Authorization; appropriation. Of the funds available in the Coronavirus
12 Relief Fund, the amount of **\$5,000,000.00** is appropriated to the Agency of
13 Administration to provide grants to eligible municipalities pursuant to this
14 section.

15 (b) Requirements for grant applicants. A municipality may apply for a
16 grant for an eligible use, provided that:

17 (1) The municipality was compelled to close its municipal offices or
18 limit access to land records due to the COVID-19 public health emergency
19 response.

20 (2) The municipality has established and maintained a Restoration and
21 Preservation Reserve Fund pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1671.

1 (c) Grant amount; terms.

2 (1) The Agency shall establish a formula for determining the amount of
3 grant awards, which shall include a maximum grant amount. The amount of
4 each grant shall be sufficient to ensure that the preceding 40 years of a
5 municipality’s land records may be digitized and made available to the public
6 online.

7 (2) The Agency shall consider whether and by how much grant awards
8 should be adjusted based on:

9 (A) whether a municipality has received financial assistance from
10 other sources;

11 (B) the funds available for digitization in a municipality’s
12 Restoration and Preservation Reserve Fund;

13 (C) the number of property transactions within a municipality based
14 on property transfer tax data reported by the Department of Taxes; and

15 (D) whether a municipality closed or limited access to the municipal
16 clerk’s offices during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

17 Sec. 4. GUIDELINES; REPORTING

18 (a) Guidelines. Not later than ten days after the effective date of this act,
19 the Agency of Administration shall publish guidelines governing the
20 implementation of the grant program, which at minimum shall establish:

21 (1) application and award procedures;

1 (2) standards for eligible uses of grant funds;

2 (3) standards governing the amount of grant awards to ensure:

3 (A) the equitable distribution of funds among regions of the State;

4 and

5 (B) that grants are based on need and will have a meaningful impact
6 on the ability of the public to access digitized land records **online**;

7 (4) procedures to ensure that grant awards comply with the requirements
8 of the CARES Act and that the State maintains adequate records to
9 demonstrate compliance with the Act; and

10 (5) procedures to prevent, detect, and mitigate fraud, waste, error, and
11 abuse.

12 (b) Consultation. Before publishing guidelines pursuant to subsection (a) of
13 this section, the Agency shall consult with representatives of the Vermont
14 League of Cities and Towns, the Vermont Municipal Clerks and Treasurers
15 Association, and the Vermont Bar Association.

16 (c) Reporting. The Agency shall:

17 (1) provide weekly updates and information concerning grant
18 guidelines, awards, and implementation to the committees of jurisdiction of the
19 General Assembly; and

20 (2) submit a report to the General Assembly on or before August 15,
21 2020 detailing the implementation of this section, including specific

1 information concerning the amount and identity of grant recipients, which shall
2 be publicly available.

3 (d) In the event that the federal Department of the Treasury determines that
4 an expenditure of funds made available from the CARES Act was not
5 necessary or was otherwise impermissible under the Act, the Agency shall hold
6 harmless any grant recipient that accepted grant funds in good faith reliance on
7 the State concerning the municipality’s application for, or use of, the grant
8 award.

9 And by renumbering the remaining section to be numerically correct.

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(Committee vote: _____)

Representative _____

FOR THE COMMITTEE