



STATE OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Legislators
From: Legislative Council
Date: June 25, 2020 at 10:00 p.m.
Subject: H.966 - Section-by-Section Summary

Sec. 1 appropriates \$209,500,000.00 of CRF funds for broadband, IT, housing, and economic relief expenses.

Secs. 2-5 includes standard CRF administrative provisions.

Sec. 6 appropriates CRF funds for direct grants and other assistance to businesses and individuals, including:

(a)(1) \$82,000,000.00 for additional emergency economic recovery grants pursuant to 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 115 (S.350), Secs. 2–3:

(A) \$56,000,000.00 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

(B) \$26,000,000.00 to the Department of Taxes.

(2) \$2,000,000.00 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to grant to the Working Lands Enterprise Fund for grants to businesses within the agricultural, food and forest, and wood products industries for economic loss or to assist a business in adapting its products to changes in available markets or supply chains that are caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency

(3) \$5,000,000.00 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to grant to the Vermont Community Loan Fund, working in collaboration with the Vermont Commission on Women and other appropriate partners, for grants to businesses that have from zero to five employees and are at least 51 percent woman-owned or at least 51-percent minority-owned;

(4) \$1,500,000.00 to the Agency of Natural Resources for grants to outdoor recreation businesses for costs or expenses necessary to comply with or implement COVID-19 public health precautions

(5) \$5,000,000.00 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to grant to the Vermont Arts Council for grants to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations.

(b)(1) \$2,500,000.00 to the Department of Tourism and Marketing to create a Restart Vermont marketing program to encourage visitation and consumer spending in Vermont to support businesses that have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

(2) \$2,500,000.00 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to create a Restart Vermont business assistance program, through which the Agency shall

make available to businesses professional and technical assistance through qualified Recovery Navigators

(3) \$5,000,000.00 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to grant to Southeastern Vermont Community Action to act as fiscal agent for a statewide program, Restaurants and Farmers Feeding the Hungry, to provide assistance to Vermonters who are food insecure through Vermont restaurants and Vermont farms and food producers.

(c) Eligibility - a business must meet the eligibility criteria and comply with the guidelines adopted S.350 unless otherwise provided in this section, except that a business must demonstrate that it suffered a 50 percent or greater reduction in revenue from March 1, 2020 to September 1, 2020 as compared to the same period in 2019.

(d) Administration of funds. A recipient:

(1) shall coordinate directly with, and is subject to the guidelines and procedures adopted by, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development

(2) may use funds for administrative expenses, provided that the expenses represent an increase over previously budgeted amounts and are limited to what is necessary; and

(3) shall transfer funds that are both unencumbered and unspent as of September 15, 2020 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for additional emergency economic recovery grants

(e) Prohibition on multiple sources of funding - A business may not receive a grant of Coronavirus Relief Fund monies from more than one source, except that a business in the dairy sector may apply for a grant under subdivision (a)(2)(B) of this section, provided that the award is not for the same purpose covered under other assistance from the Fund.

(f) Public records; confidentiality – name and amount of grants are public; confidential return and application information are nonpublic

(g) Emergency economic recovery grant funds; transfer – any S.350 funds that remain both unencumbered and unspent as of August 1, 2020 are combined with and subject to conditions on funds in this act

Sec. 7 appropriates \$13M to the Agency of Administration for the purpose of issuing grants to units of local government to reimburse eligible COVID-19 expenses incurred on or before December 30, 2020. Out of the \$13M, \$12.65M goes to Vermont cities, towns, unorganized towns or gores, and any of the unified towns and gores of Essex County including those incurred by incorporated villages, fire districts, consolidated water districts, and consolidated sewer districts therein, and counties, with certain per person limitations. Out of the \$13M, \$200,000 goes to solid waste management districts and up to \$150,000 may be used to contract with one or more regional planning commissions for technical assistance to be provided to units of local government in identifying and documenting eligible COVID-19 expenses.

Secs. 8 and 10 provide definitions, require publication of guidelines, and impose reporting requirements on the Agency of Administration for the implementation and administration of the digitization grant program.

Sec. 9 appropriates \$2M to the Agency of Administration to provide grants to eligible municipalities for the purpose of assisting those municipalities in digitizing land records

for online public access during municipal office closures due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Sec. 10 (see Sec. 8 above)

Sec. 11 appropriates CRF funds for housing, including:

(1) Legal and counseling services - \$550,000.00 to Vermont Legal Aid to provide legal and counseling services to persons who are, or are at risk of, experiencing homelessness, or who have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19 crisis; and \$250,000.00 to the DHCD for counseling and assistance to landlords concerning tenancy, rental assistance, and related issues arising due to the COVID-19 crisis.

(2) Housing and facilities. \$9,000,000.00 to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board for housing and facilities necessary to provide safe shelter and assistance for persons who are, or are at risk of, experiencing homelessness, or who have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19 crisis

(3) Foreclosure protection. \$5,000,000.00 to the Vermont Housing Finance Agency to provide financial and technical assistance to stabilize low- and moderate-income homeowners and prevent home foreclosures for Vermont families.

(4) Rental assistance; eviction protection. \$25,000,000.00 to the Vermont State Housing Authority, which shall administer the distribution of funds to landlords on behalf of tenants in need of rental arrearage assistance.

(5) Rehousing investments - \$6,200,000.00 to the Department of Housing and Community Development to design and implement a Re-housing Recovery Program to provide funding to statewide and regional housing partner organizations for grants to eligible landlords to renovate housing units that are vacant, blighted, or in violation of housing laws, to provide housing to persons with COVID-19-related need.

(b) On or after September 15, 2020, the Department of Housing and Community Development, in consultation with the funding recipients named in this section, shall assess the allocation and expenditure of funds made in this section and may re-allocate funds as the Department determines is necessary to most effectively provide necessary housing-related assistance to Vermonters affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Sec. 12 appropriates \$12,000,000.00 for programs and services that support safe, stable housing opportunities for Vermont households experiencing homelessness as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency and related administrative costs, such as:

- (1) expanding the Vermont Rental Subsidy program;
- (2) providing or arranging for housing navigation and case management services;
- (3) providing financial assistance to Vermont households who are living in motels to help them rapidly resolve their homelessness;
- (4) supplementing the General Assistance motel voucher program; and
- (5) capitalizing a housing risk pool for landlords to encourage rentals to individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

Sec. 13 appropriates \$17,433,500 for the COVID-Response Accelerated Broadband Connectivity Program to support broadband deployment in VT.

Sec. 14 appropriates \$800K for the COVID-Response Connected Community Resilience Program, which provides planning grants to communications union districts.

Secs. 15-16 appropriates \$500K for a COVID-Response Telecommunications Recovery Plan and extends the deadline for the next 10-year State Telecom Plan, accordingly.

Sec. 17 appropriates \$800K for the COVID-Response Telehealth Connectivity program, administered by VPQHC to support telehealth equipment and training for patients and providers.

Secs. 18-19 appropriates \$466,500 for the PEG access channels and requires ACCD to study opportunities for ensuring financial stability and viability of access media organizations.

Sec. 20 appropriates \$5M to the Department of Public Service to provide financial assistance to utility ratepayers facing financial hardship. Program covers utility arrearages.

Sec. 21 appropriates \$2,000,000.00 to the Agency of Digital Services to conduct a cybersecurity risk assessment to mitigate cybersecurity risks as State employees increase remote work due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Sec. 22 makes act effective on passage.