

VACCE

Vermont Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives

P.O. Box 810, Montpelier, VT 05601

August 14, 2020

To Our Distinguished State Representatives and Senators:

We are one of the few organizations that needs no introduction to you or your fellow legislators. The Vermont Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (VACCE) represents 30 chambers throughout the state, reaching into every corner and community of Vermont.

For generations, chambers of commerce in the state have greeted visitors to our regions, published thousands of brochures, hosted annual legislative breakfasts, advocated for every business in our respective communities and organized countless regional fairs, festivals and events. A recent study, in fact, indicated that chambers are considered one of the most respected organizations in America.

And then came Covid-19.... Revenue streams that once flowed strongly to our chambers have slowed to a trickle. Our membership dues, sponsorships and fundraisers have all but dried up, as businesses struggle for their own existence, and our events, many which bring in needed income, have all been cancelled due to the pandemic.

Many do not realize that chambers receive no financial assistance from municipal, state and federal agencies to run our operations, that we run our organizations solely on our own.

At this critical time, when this outbreak has affected every aspect of our state and national economies, chambers are needed more than ever to assist our businesses and regions in rebuilding. Our organizations have stepped up, mightily, the past months of this pandemic to help our state weather this financial storm, and it is expected this support will be needed long into the future.

It is hard to put into words how much more has been added to our plates due to the Covid-19 crisis. Chambers have taken on this extra work, willingly, trying to help our businesses and regions strengthen and recover, even while no money was coming into our organizations to fund such efforts.

We are becoming increasingly fearful that chambers could be yet another casualty of this outbreak, as we are starting to financially run on empty. Inexplicably, almost all of the federal Covid assistance, including PPP monies, has been denied to chambers, threatening our very existence.

We are very appreciative of the state's efforts to help us, most notably through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development's Vermont Economy Recovery Grant. Unfortunately, the end date of Sept. 1 for lost income does not take into account many of the fall events and festivals that had to be cancelled, many which serve as fundraisers for us, and additional monies we would have received down the road.

Quite simply, we need a dedicated stream of funds, right now, that is designed to refuel, re-energize and retool our chambers, to help us address the challenges of the new economy ahead. We are not alone in

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needing this funding, however. As we plan ahead, every non-profit organization and business, but most especially chambers right now, will need these funds to help bring our economy back to life.

One of our chamber directors said it best when he noted, “These are exceptional times, like nothing we have ever experienced before. Our organizations will be expected to be the glue that keeps our regions together during these difficult times. The strong leadership of chambers is needed, to not only strengthen our economy but bring back our businesses from the financial edge.”

As a leader during this pandemic, Vermont will continue to be seen nationally and internationally as a place of opportunity, diversity and prosperity, not only in the next decade but beyond. Chambers of commerce in Vermont, long known and respected for our own service to the state, want to be there to assist in this effort.

We ask that the state award a one-time \$1 million appropriation to VACCE, a proposal supported by the state’s Regional Planning and Development commissions (RPCs & RDCs). These monies would be dispersed to chambers throughout Vermont, allowing our organizations to continue providing strong business advocacy and support during these challenging times.

Businesses are calling out for us to help them, and we want to be able to answer their calls, as we always have. We need your assistance and support to do that. We need your strong support on this initiative as we continue our mission of strengthening and assisting Vermont’s business community. Thank you very much for your consideration of this very important request.

Sincerely,

The Vermont Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives

This action was approved by the VACCE Board of Directors and Members on 8-13-20.