

Vermont Reach Up Coalition

Pandemic Response and State FY22 Budget Requests

Reach Up Coalition

Disability Rights Vermont
 Hunger Free Vermont
 Public Assets Institute
 Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition
 Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
 Vermont Legal Aid
 Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council
 Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
 Vermont Parent Child Center Network
 Voices for Vermont's Children

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We recommend the following steps that will prevent damaging hardship for Vermont's children – hardships that may have lifelong impacts on their health and economic security.

Pandemic Response in Housing Allowance

The infusion of federal COVID relief housing funds for low-income Vermonters provides a unique opportunity to make a substantial move toward meeting the basic needs of children. While we understand that COVID relief funds are considered "one-time money," a year in the life of a child matters.

We ask you to use the Emergency Rental Assistance funds available right now to cover a housing allowance for all Reach Up families that is reflective of today's fair market rates.

Increase Reach Up Grants to meet needs

We propose increasing the Reach Up personal needs grants by 38%, so that they better meet the subsistence budget needs of families.

The chart below draws from the Joint Fiscal Office's Basic Needs Budget for a family of three for the essential costs of living. We estimate the benefit for a typical family would need to increase by 38% - from the current \$774 to \$1069 – to meet their basic needs in these areas.

Making that increase apply to the whole Reach Up program would require an appropriation of \$8-10 million in the FY22 budget to increase funding from the proposed \$21 million for this program.

Family Household Expenses	Joint Fiscal Office Basic Needs Budget Items	Less Other Benefits	Remaining Costs	Current
Food	\$759.00	\$616.00	\$143.00	\$0.00
Housing (incl utilities)	\$1,628.00	\$1,628.00*	\$0.00	\$0.00
Transportation	\$483.00	\$100.00**	\$383.00	\$0.00
Clothing & Household expenses	\$250.00		\$250.00	\$0.00
Personal Expenses	\$189.00		\$189.00	
Telecommunications	\$117.00	-\$13.00	\$104.00	\$0.00
Monthly Total:	\$3,426.00	\$2,330.90	\$1,069.00	\$774.00

* from Emergency Rental Assistance (12 month subsidy for 100% of rent and utility costs)

**from supportive services budget

Note that increasing the benefit also increases the number of children and families who are eligible, so there may also be increased caseload costs. We recommend that modeling be requested from DCF.

Repeal the SSI Reduction

We also request that the benefit reduction for families with a disabled adult be repealed completely. This reduction was made several years ago as a cost-cutting policy change that we argues was both unwise and unjust.