

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Appropriations to which was referred House Bill No.

3 159 entitled “An act relating to creating the Better Places Program”

4 respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the

5 bill be amended as follows:

6 First: In Sec. 1, tourism and marketing; appropriation, in subsection (c), by

7 striking out “\$1,000,000.00” and inserting in lieu thereof “\$2,500,000.00” and

8 by striking out “General Fund” and inserting “funds available to the State

9 under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021”

10 Second: By striking out Sec. 2, technology-based economic development

11 program; appropriation, in its entirety and inserting in lieu thereof a new Sec. 2

12 to read:

13 Sec. 2. TECHNOLOGY-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

14 PROGRAM; APPROPRIATION

15 (a) In fiscal year 2022, the amount of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated from

16 the amounts available to the State through the American Rescue Plan Act of

17 2021 to the University of Vermont to design and implement a technology-

18 based economic development program, consistent with the following:

19 (1) Small business innovation research; small business technical

20 transfer; technical assistance. A total of \$200,000.00 to provide technical

21 assistance to first-time applicants pursuing a federal SBIR or STTR grant.

1           (2) SBIR; STTR; Phase I and Phase II matching grants. A total of  
2           \$400,000.00 to provide a 50 percent State matching grant, up to \$50,000.00, to  
3           businesses that receive a federal SBIR/STTR Phase I or Phase II grant.

4           (3) Industry research partnership program. A total of \$200,000.00 to  
5           provide a 100 percent matching grant to Vermont small businesses:

6           (A) to purchase services and technical assistance from universities  
7           and research institutions, including research and development assistance,  
8           technology assessments, product prototyping, lab validation, and overcoming  
9           development hurdles; and

10           (B) to establish better relationships among Vermont businesses and  
11           higher education researchers, speed time-to-market for new technologies, and  
12           help keep Vermont companies relevant in the marketplace.

13           (4) University of Vermont Office of Engagement. A total of  
14           \$200,000.00 to the Office of Engagement to administer the funds pursuant to  
15           this subsection.

16           (b) In fiscal year 2022, the amount of \$2,000,000 is appropriated from the  
17           amounts available to the State under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to  
18           the University of Vermont Office of Engagement for a two-year period to  
19           leverage the research services and data science capabilities of the University.

20           (c) On or before January 15, 2022, the University of Vermont shall report  
21           to the General Assembly concerning the implementation of this section,

1 including the provision of grants and technical assistance; the number of  
2 businesses assisted; how many SBIR/STTR phase I & II matching grants  
3 awarded; how many businesses received the maximum grant; how many  
4 matching grants and the amounts awarded through the industry research  
5 partnership program; and the nature and scope of assistance provided through  
6 the Office of Engagement.

7 (d) The University of Vermont shall use the funds appropriated in this  
8 section to promote technology-based businesses and to provide assistance to  
9 Vermont businesses that have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19  
10 public health emergency consistent with the American Rescue Plan Act of  
11 2021.

12 Third: By striking out Sec. 4, appropriation, in its entirety and inserting in  
13 lieu thereof a new Sec. 4 to read:

14 Sec. 4. APPROPRIATION

15 The Department of Labor shall allocate not more than \$75,000.00 from the  
16 amounts available in the Workforce Expansion Fund to implement Sec. 3 of  
17 this act.

18 Fourth: By adding a new Sec. 7a to read:

19 Sec. 7a. APPROPRIATION

20 In fiscal year 2022, the amount of \$5,000,000.00 is appropriated from the  
21 funds available to the State under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to the

1 Better Places Fund to implement the Better Places Program created in Sec. 7 of  
2 this act.

3 Fifth: By striking out Sec. 16, workforce development and education, in its  
4 entirety and inserting in lieu thereof a new Sec. 16 to read:

5 Sec. 16. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

6 (a) Findings.

7 (1) Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Vermont State  
8 Colleges have experienced a significant decrease in applications, and the board  
9 of directors has voted to freeze tuition for the 2021–2022 academic year both  
10 to keep students’ costs low and to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19  
11 on enrollment.

12 (2) Deposit activity, a signal of anticipated enrollment for the fall 2021  
13 semester, has declined between five and 20 percent at two of the four VSC  
14 institutions, and FAFSA filing for Vermont is down seven percent year over  
15 year.

16 (3) While the enrollment gap is narrowing from earlier in the fall, it is  
17 still significantly wider than normal due to the complexities of how the  
18 pandemic is affecting Vermont’s high schools and high school students, for  
19 example, due to remote learning and the necessity for guidance counselors to  
20 broaden the reach of their services to struggling students.

1           (4)(A) The federal Pell Grant eligibility for first-time, full-time Vermont  
2           students is high, signifying that families are financially distressed.

3           (B) In the fall of 2019, the percentage of first-time, full-time students  
4           who were Pell eligible were as follows: CCV (57 percent), CU (39 percent),  
5           NVU (49 percent), and VTC (41 percent).

6           (C) These students, already economically disadvantaged, are  
7           disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and related economic crisis.

8           (5) In addition to increasing the needs of Vermont’s secondary and  
9           postsecondary students, the COVID-19 pandemic has also placed significant  
10           burden on the Vermont workforce, which can benefit from expanded  
11           opportunities available at the Vermont State Colleges.

12           (b) Purpose. In light of these findings, it is the intent of the General  
13           Assembly to provide funding in the Big Bill to expand opportunities for  
14           education at the Vermont State Colleges for Vermonters:

15           (A) who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through  
16           layoffs, furloughs, or reduced hours or due to being employed in an industry  
17           that has been severely affected; and

18           (B) who are pursuing education and training and require educational  
19           assistance and other support due to economic harm and lost opportunities  
20           arising from the COVID-19 public health emergency.

1        Sixth: In Sec. 17, Microbusiness Development Program; EMBRACE, in  
2        subsection (c), following “appropriated” by inserting “from the funds available  
3        to the State under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021”

4        Seventh: In Sec. 18, State BIPOC business network development, in  
5        subsection (c) by striking out “General Fund” and inserting in lieu thereof  
6        “from the funds available to the State under the American Rescue Plan Act of  
7        2021”

8        Eighth: In Sec. 20, Entrepreneurs’ Seed Capital Fund, in subsection (b), by  
9        striking out “\$1,000,000.00” and inserting in lieu thereof “\$900,000.00”

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(Committee vote: \_\_\_\_\_)

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Representative \_\_\_\_\_

FOR THE COMMITTEE