



**COVID Gaps in Emergency Funding Appropriations
House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development**

Charles Martin, Government Affairs Director

February 3, 2021

The Vermont Chamber represents thousands of members located around Vermont in nearly every sector. Throughout the pandemic and related economic downturn, our staff has maintained daily communication with business sectors including hospitality, manufacturing, retail, professional services and more. As a result of this routine engagement, we have developed an informed perspective on the successes and shortfalls of state and federal relief programs implemented over the past year.

Our members are aware of and thankful for actions taken by the Legislature and the Scott Administration to address the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including your support of relief grant programs implemented over the Summer and Fall. While much of the business community did receive meaningful support from past relief packages, some were entirely unable to access certain funding streams, and many of those who did access some form of previous relief funding continue to face a grim economic outlook.

Small employers, new businesses, seasonal businesses, existing businesses that changed ownership, growth businesses and others who may have not had the time or resources necessary to navigate application processes are some of those who were left out of one or more previously established relief programs. Recognizing the immense financial challenges facing this essential component of Vermont's economy, the Vermont Chamber fully supports the Administration's proposal for providing aid to pandemic-impacted businesses left out of federal and state programs.

We hope the Legislature recognizes the existing need in unserved sectors while also remaining cognizant of the need that continues to grow in sectors that have previously accessed some form of relief. Considering the lack of any assurances that business operations will return to "normal" by this summer, businesses of all types continue to face widespread uncertainty. Reluctance by officials to publicly map reopening benchmarks is in some ways understandable. However, considering the difficulties this causes for business planning, we encourage the Legislature to work with the Administration to provide a level of certainty in the form of an additional clearly defined relief program that can serve businesses now and into what is expected to be an economically depressed Summer season.