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## T E S T I M O N Y

To: House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development  
Cc: Michael Harrington, Commissioner of Labor  
From: Sarah Buxton, Director of Workforce Development, Commissioner of Labor  
Date: March 16, 2021  
Subject: Department testimony regarding Workforce Expansion budget items and H.360

This testimony describes the Departments support for the broadband labor force expansion sections of H.360, with limited concerns, and its support for the workforce expansion programs included in the Department's FY2022 budget.

### H.360 - "Broadband Bill"

The Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) testified before the House Committee on Energy and Technology regarding the labor force expansion sections of H.360. The Department provided feedback and recommendations and suggested changes, which the Committee accepted and incorporated. The Department supports the bill in its present form.

Relevant sections are pasted here:

\* \* \* Communications Workforce Development \* \* \*

#### Sec. 20. BROADBAND OCCUPATIONAL NEEDS SURVEY

(a) The Commissioner of Labor shall conduct an occupational needs survey to determine workforce needs in the communications sector specific to broadband buildout and maintenance. In conducting this survey, the Commissioner shall solicit input from employers and subcontractors throughout the State. The Department of Public Service and communications union districts shall assist the Department of Labor in identifying employers with workforce



needs connected to this act. The purpose of the survey is to identify current and future employment opportunities and the prerequisite skills needed for widespread worker recruitment and building a talent pipeline to support the goals of this act.

(b) The Commissioner shall report his or her findings and recommendations to the relevant legislative committees of jurisdiction on or before January 15, 2022.

(c) Employers who do not participate in supplying information for this report will not be eligible for grant funding under this act.

#### Sec. 21. FTTX; INCUMBENT TRAINING PROGRAM

Vermont Technical College, in consultation with the Vermont Department of Labor, shall establish an incumbent training program for communications installers and technicians. The goal of the program is to provide skills upgrades for existing employees. Up to \$40,000.00 is appropriated from the Vermont Department of Labor's fiscal year 2022 Training Fund to support this training program.

#### Sec. 22. BROADBAND INSTALLER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

The Commissioner of Labor, working with broadband employers, shall establish a federally registered apprenticeship program that meets one or more occupational needs related to the installation and maintenance of broadband networks.

\* \* \* Appropriations; Fund Transfers \* \* \*

#### Sec. 23. APPROPRIATIONS; FUND TRANSFERS

(a) Appropriations. The following appropriations are contemplated by this act:

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(3) \$100,000.00 to the Department of Labor to support the broadband occupational needs survey required by Sec. 20 and the broadband installer apprenticeship program established in Sec. 22 of this act as follows:

(A) \$3,000.00 to finance the development of the apprenticeship program;

(B) \$90,000.00 to support the related instruction tuition and on-the-job training contracts with employer-sponsors under the apprenticeship program; and



(C) \$7,000.00 to support work related to developing, conducting, and reporting on the occupational needs survey that is not federally funded (. . .)

<b>FY2022 Workforce Expansion Funds</b>
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The Department’s FY2022 budget includes \$1,335,900 described as Workforce Expansion funds. This appropriation provides level funding of the programs described in FY2021 as “Workforce Development Grants & Programs” and represents a substantially similar allocation of funds that were formerly known as “Next Generation” funds. Until FY2020, the Department would account for these funds under a separate process. In that fiscal year, the House Appropriations Committee eliminated the Next Generation funding and moved the programs and activities described below under the Department’s general budget.

**Former “Next Generation” Programs; Current Workforce Expansion Funds**

<b>Program or Grant</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>
Vermont Internship Program	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$380,000
Vermont Returnship Program	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Adult CTE Grants	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$370,000
Vermont Training Grants	\$277,000	\$350,000	\$350,000
Ex-Offender Support Grants	\$75,000		
Administration	\$133,900	\$135,900	\$135,900
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,335,900</b>	<b>\$1,335,900</b>	<b>\$1,335,900</b>

**Vermont Internship Program:** The Vermont Internship Program promotes internships by providing grants to organizations who support or connect Vermont employers with student interns from regional career and technical education (CTE) centers or post-secondary educational institutions. Funding may be used to build or administer an internship program or to provide participants with need-based stipends during the internship. In FY 2020, VDOL awarded \$350,000 in Vermont Internship Program grants through a competitive application process.

In FY 2020, VDOL started including an opportunity for organizations to apply for increased funding if they produced a program match -- which could take the form of funding for program administration, intern stipends, job- related equipment or supplies, mentoring or coaching of employer or intern, and employer incentives. The purpose of the matched grant awards is to expand the availability of high-quality internships by leveraging state investment and promoting private investment in internship opportunities.



FY 2020 Grantees (FY 2021 Grantees are currently being selected):

Bennington County Regional Commission (Bennington)  
Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (Brattleboro)  
Casella Waste Systems, Inc. (Rutland)  
Cathedral Square (South Burlington) North Country Career Center (Newport)  
Norwich University (Northfield)  
Hannaford Career Technical Center & Addison Co. Parent Child Center (Middlebury)  
University of Vermont and State Agriculture College (Burlington)  
Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sport (Killington)  
Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (Burlington)  
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (Winooski)  
Vermont Vehicle and Automotive Distributors Association (Barre)

**Vermont Returnship Program:** The Vermont Returnship Program was launched in 2018 in partnership with Associates for Training and Development (A4TD). It is designed to provide opportunities for unemployed experienced workers to reenter the workforce, particularly in a new line of work; and to promote labor force retention by allowing workers to explore new and different types of work that better suits their needs. The central elements of the program include:

- Assessing and identifying transferrable skills, job goals, and training needs of participants,
- Supporting and counseling participants in creating a new career plan for success that involves some form of work placement,
- Making individual referrals to supportive service agencies (if needed) or current job openings,
- Training or partnering to train individuals in workplace-specific skill or familiarity competencies, credentialed training opportunities,
- Delivering workshops aimed at assisting jobseekers in discovering, readying, and applying for open positions,
- Working with employers to develop temporary and long-term employment opportunities that consider returning worker needs (e.g. schedule flexibility, mentoring, technology & industry- related professional development, etc.), and
- Matching employers and participants.

In its first year from October 1, 2018 to December 31, 2019, the Vermont Returnship program received 118 applications, referred 54 applicants to employment opportunities, provided services to 106 individuals, and delivered 12 workshops. In its second year, the pandemic hit and many in-person activities were suspended. VDOL modified the grant to extend the end of the performance, so final numbers are still pending. Here are examples of how the program is supporting our 2020 applicants:



- A sales executive (55-65) with 30+ years of experience, having successfully recovered from a serious illness, is seeking to reinvent himself as a virtual sales manager for a Vermont-based company. We have secured funding through VSAC and UVM Continuing Education for a Salesforce Certification program. Expertise in this widely used customer relationship management software increases his competitiveness and will open doors for a Returnship.
- Experienced records management professional (55-65) with public/private sector experience who moved to VT in 2018 to enhance her life quality, is seeking a records management position in State Government or private sector. To satisfy the State's certification requirements, we are funding an additional certification through Institute of Certified Records Managers. Our intention is to leverage that certification into a Returnship and/or employment.

**Adult CTE Grants:** Each of the 17 regional CTE centers received \$20,000 to support the delivery of career and technical education to unemployed adults, underemployed adults, and employed adults interested in increasing their skill sets through the adult career and technical education programs. This funding pays for the salary of adult program directors, staff, and instructors. Funding may also be used to support tuition or scholarships for post-secondary students enrolled in an adult program; development of adult course curriculum, supplies for classroom use, and professional development or administrative support that promotes greater collaboration among centers programs in furtherance of a coordinated adult education and training system. \$60,000 was awarded to the Vermont Adult Career and Technical Education Association (VACTEA) to support the statewide coordination, promotion, and administration of adult career and technical education (CTE) in Vermont. This will include funding for the development of statewide programs, a single site for listing adult CTE courses, work on data and metric collection, and shared marketing and outreach material.

**Vermont Training Grants:** FY2021 grant awards have not been finally awarded as of this testimony. The current grants in development include trainings for health care, childcare, broadband, and construction.

