

1 S.39

2 Introduced by Senators Hardy, Clarkson, Gulick, Hashim, Norris, Ram

3 Hinsdale, Vyhovsky, Watson and White

4 Referred to Committee on Government Operations

5 Date: January 26, 2023

6 Subject: Legislature; salaries and fees; health insurance; legislator

7 compensation and benefits

8 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to make
9 members of the General Assembly eligible for the State employees' health
10 benefit plan at no cost and to allow them to participate in any flexible spending
11 account program offered to State employees for health care expenses or
12 dependent care expenses, or both. The bill would also provide compensation
13 to members of the General Assembly during adjournment and would allow
14 members of the General Assembly to choose whether to receive their payments
15 for meals and lodging expenses as an allowance, which may be treated as
16 income subject to tax for federal and State income tax purposes, or as
17 reimbursement of actual expenses, which may be excluded from income for
18 federal and State income tax purposes. The bill would allow a legislator to be
19 reimbursed for child care, dependent care, and elder care expenses that are
20 necessary to facilitate the member's service in the General Assembly. The bill
21 would expand the legislative leave of absence law to allow members to take a

1 leave of absence from any job, not only a full-time job, in order to serve in the
2 General Assembly. The bill would also create the Legislative Service Working
3 Group to consider and make recommendations on issues involving legislative
4 compensation and benefits, staffing, administrative support, and the length of
5 the legislative session.

6 An act relating to compensation and benefits for members of the Vermont
7 General Assembly

8 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

9 ~~*** Health Insurance Benefits ***~~

10 Sec. 1. 3 V.S.A. § 631 is amended to read:

11 § 631. GROUP INSURANCE FOR STATE EMPLOYEES; SALARY
12 DEDUCTIONS FOR INSURANCE, SAVINGS PLANS, AND
13 CREDIT UNIONS

14 (a)(1) The Secretary of Administration may contract on behalf of the State
15 with any insurance company or nonprofit association doing business in this
16 State to secure the benefits of franchise or group insurance. Beginning on
17 July 1, 1978, the terms of coverage under the policy shall be determined under
18 section 904 of this title, but it may include:

19

1 ~~(2)(A)(i) As used in this section, the term “employees” includes any~~
2 ~~class or classes of elected or appointed officials, State’s Attorneys, sheriffs,~~
3 ~~employees of State’s Attorneys’ offices whose compensation is administered~~
4 ~~through the State of Vermont payroll system, except contractual and temporary~~
5 ~~employees, and deputy sheriffs paid by the State of Vermont pursuant to~~
6 ~~24 V.S.A. § 290(b). The term “employees” shall does not include members of~~
7 ~~the General Assembly as such, any person rendering service on a retainer or~~
8 ~~fee basis, members of boards or commissions, or persons other than employees~~
9 ~~of the Vermont Historical Society, the Vermont Film Corporation, the Vermont~~
10 ~~State Employees’ Credit Union, Vermont State Employees’ Association, and~~
11 ~~the Vermont Council on the Arts, whose compensation for service is not paid~~
12 ~~from the State Treasury, or any elected or appointed official unless the except~~
13 ~~as specifically provided pursuant to this subdivision (a)(2)(A)(i). The term~~
14 ~~“employees” includes employees of the Vermont Historical Society, the~~
15 ~~Vermont State Employees’ Credit Union, the Vermont State Employees’~~
16 ~~Association, the Vermont Council on the Arts, and any elected or appointed~~
17 ~~official who is actively engaged in and devoting substantially full-time to the~~
18 ~~conduct of the business of his or her the official’s public office. The term~~
19 ~~“employees” also includes members of the General Assembly as set forth in~~
20 ~~subdivision (iv) of this subdivision (a)(2)(A).~~

21

1 ~~(iv) For purposes of group hospital surgical medical expense~~
2 insurance and any flexible spending account program offered to State
3 employees for health care or dependent care expenses, or both, the term
4 “employees” includes members of the General Assembly.

5 (B)(i) The premiums for extending insurance coverage to employees
6 shall be paid in full by the Vermont Historical Society, ~~the Vermont Film~~
7 ~~Corporation~~, the Vermont State Employees’ Association, the Vermont State
8 Employees’ Credit Union, the Vermont Council on the Arts, or their respective
9 retirees. Nothing herein creates a legal obligation on the part of the State of
10 Vermont to pay any portion of the premiums required to extend insurance
11 coverage to this group of employees.

12 (ii) The premiums for extending insurance coverage to members
13 of the General Assembly shall be paid in full by the General Assembly.

14 * * *

15 * * * Compensation and Expenses * * *

16 Sec. 2. 32 V.S.A. § 1051 is amended to read:

17 § 1051. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE AND PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE
18 OF THE SENATE; COMPENSATION AND EXPENSE
19 REIMBURSEMENT

20 (a) The Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate
21 shall be entitled to receive annual compensation of \$10,000.00 for the 2005

1 ~~Biennial Session and thereafter, to be paid in biweekly payments, provided~~
2 that, beginning on January 1, 2007, the annual compensation shall be adjusted
3 annually thereafter by the cost of living adjustment negotiated for State
4 employees under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, except that,
5 beginning on July 1, 2021 and annually thereafter on January 1, the annual
6 compensation shall be adjusted consistent with the compensation increases
7 provided to other constitutional officers. In addition to the annual
8 compensation, the Speaker and President Pro Tempore shall be entitled to
9 receive:

10 * * *

11 (3) an allowance for or reimbursement of expenses for mileage; meals;
12 and lodging expenses; and child, dependent, and elder care as provided to
13 members of the General Assembly under subsection 1052(b) of this title
14 during the biennial, adjourned, and special sessions of the General Assembly
15 and in addition such other actual and necessary expenses incurred while
16 engaged in duties imposed by law.

17 Sec. 3. 32 V.S.A. § 1052 is amended to read:

18 § 1052. MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY; COMPENSATION
19 AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT

20 (a) Compensation.

1 ~~(1) Session compensation. Each member of the General Assembly,~~
2 other than the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the
3 Senate, is entitled to a weekly salary of \$589.00 for the 2005 Biennial Session
4 and thereafter, provided that, beginning on January 1, 2007, the weekly
5 compensation shall be adjusted annually thereafter by the cost of living
6 adjustment negotiated for State employees under the most recent collective
7 bargaining agreement, except that, beginning on July 1, 2021 and annually
8 thereafter on January 1, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted consistent
9 with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers. The
10 salary of members shall be paid in bi-weekly installments.

11 ~~(2) Special session compensation. During a special session, a member~~
12 is entitled to an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly
13 compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection, rounded up to the
14 nearest dollar, for each day of a special session ~~on which the House of which~~
15 ~~he or she is a~~ that the House in which the member serves shall sit.

16 ~~(3) Adjournment compensation.~~

17 ~~(A) During adjournment of the General Assembly, a member is~~
18 ~~entitled to an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly~~
19 ~~compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection (a), rounded up to~~
20 ~~the nearest dollar, for each week of the adjournment of the General Assembly.~~

1 ~~(B) During adjournment of the General Assembly, a member who is~~
2 ~~serving on a special committee or joint committee shall, in addition to the~~
3 ~~weekly adjournment compensation set forth in subdivision (A) of this~~
4 ~~subdivision (3) and the per diem compensation set forth in 2 V.S.A. § 23, be~~
5 ~~entitled to compensation for time spent preparing for meetings of the special or~~
6 ~~joint committee at an hourly rate equal to 2.5 percent of the annually adjusted~~
7 ~~weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection (a).~~

8 (b) Expenses. During any session of the General Assembly, each member
9 is entitled to receive an allowance for or reimbursement of expenses as
10 follows: set forth in this subsection.

11 (1) Mileage reimbursement. ~~Reimbursement~~ Each member shall receive
12 reimbursement in an amount equal to the actual mileage traveled for each day
13 of session in which the member travels between Montpelier and the member's
14 home or from Montpelier or from the member's home to another site on
15 officially sanctioned legislative business. Reimbursement of actual mileage
16 traveled under this subdivision shall be at the rate per mile determined by the
17 federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal
18 Register for the year of the session.

19 (2) Meals and lodging allowance. Each member shall receive either a
20 meals allowance or reimbursement of actual meals expenses. Each member
21 shall inform the Office of Legislative Operations of the member's choice of a

1 ~~meals allowance or meals expense reimbursement prior to the beginning of~~
2 each biennium, and the member's choice shall remain in effect through the
3 remainder of the biennium unless the member notifies the Office that the
4 member wishes to make a change.

5 (A) Meals allowance. A member who elects to receive a meals
6 allowance shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for meals and
7 lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of
8 Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of
9 the session, for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.

10 (B) Meals reimbursement. A member who elects to receive
11 reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual
12 amounts expended by the member for meals for each day that the House in
13 which the member serves shall sit, as well as meals for the night preceding the
14 first legislative day of each week during the legislative session. The amount of
15 the daily reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision shall not exceed
16 the daily amount for meals determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal
17 Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for
18 the year of the session. The member shall provide meal receipts or otherwise
19 substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of Legislative Operations in
20 the form and manner prescribed by the Director of Legislative Operations.

1 ~~(2) Lodging. Each member shall receive either a lodging allowance or~~
2 reimbursement of actual lodging expenses. Each member shall inform the
3 Office of Legislative Operations of the member's choice of a lodging
4 allowance or lodging expense reimbursement prior to the beginning of each
5 biennium, and the member's choice shall remain in effect through the
6 remainder of the biennium unless the member notifies the Office that the
7 member wishes to make a change.

8 (A) Lodging allowance. A member who elects to receive a lodging
9 allowance shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for lodging
10 determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-
11 wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session
12 for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.

13 (B) Lodging reimbursement. A member who elects to receive
14 reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual
15 amounts expended by the member for lodging for each day that the House in
16 which the member serves shall sit, as well as lodging for the night preceding
17 the first legislative day of each week during the legislative session. The
18 amount of the daily reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision shall
19 not exceed the daily amount for lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont,
20 by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal
21 Register for the year of the session. The member shall provide lodging

1 ~~receipts or otherwise substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of~~
2 Legislative Operations in the form and manner prescribed by the Director of
3 Legislative Operations.

4 (4) Child, dependent, and elder care reimbursement.

5 (A) Each member shall be eligible to receive reimbursement equal to
6 the actual amounts expended by the member for child care, dependent care, or
7 elder care services in this State, or a combination, that is necessary to facilitate
8 the member's service in the General Assembly. The total amount of the
9 reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision (4) shall not exceed the
10 federal maximum annual household contribution limit for a dependent care
11 flexible spending account.

12 (B) Expenses shall not be reimbursed under this subdivision (4) to
13 the extent they are being reimbursed or subsidized by another source or if
14 reimbursement or subsidies are reasonably available from another source.

15 (C) As used in this subdivision (4):

16 (i) "Child care" and "dependent care" mean care provided to an
17 individual who would be a qualifying individual for purposes of the federal
18 child and dependent care tax credit.

19 (ii) "Elder care" means care provided to an adult 65 years of age
20 or older in the home or in an adult day program.

1 ~~(2)(5) Absences. If a member is absent for reasons other than sickness~~
2 or legislative business for one or more entire days while the house in which the
3 member sits is in session, the member shall notify the Office of Legislative
4 Operations of that absence, and ~~expenses received shall not include the amount~~
5 ~~that the legislature specifies was not incurred~~ the member shall not be
6 reimbursed for mileage, meals, or lodging expenses incurred during the period
7 of that absence.

8 (c) ~~For attending a meeting of the Joint Fiscal Committee when a member~~
9 ~~is not receiving compensation as a member of the General Assembly, a~~
10 ~~member of the Joint Fiscal Committee shall be entitled to the same per diem~~
11 ~~compensation and reimbursement for necessary expenses as provided members~~
12 ~~of the General Assembly for attendance at sessions of the General Assembly.~~

13 [Repealed.]

14 (d) Death of a member. If a member of the General Assembly dies while
15 the General Assembly is in session, the estate of the deceased member shall be
16 entitled to receive compensation for the entire pay period in which the death
17 occurred.

18 * * * Legislative Leave from Employment * * *

19 Sec. 4. 21 V.S.A. § 496 is amended to read:

20 § 496. LEGISLATIVE LEAVE

1 ~~(c) Any person who, in order to serve as a member of the General~~
2 ~~Assembly, must leave a full-time position in the employ of any employer, shall~~
3 ~~be entitled to a temporary or partial leave of absence for the purpose of~~
4 ~~allowing such employee to perform any official duty in connection with his or~~
5 ~~her the person's elected office. Such leave of absence shall not cause loss of~~
6 ~~job status, seniority, or the right to participate in insurance and other employee~~
7 ~~benefits during the leave of absence.~~

8 * * *

9 * * * Legislative Service Working Group * * *

10 Sec. 5. LEGISLATIVE SERVICE WORKING GROUP

11 (a) Creation. There is created the Legislative Service Working Group to
12 consider issues related to serving as a member of the Vermont General
13 Assembly.

14 (b) Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following
15 members:

16 (1) three current members of the House of Representatives, not all from
17 the same political party, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House;
18 and

19 (2) three current members of the Senate, not all from the same political
20 party, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees.

1 ~~(a) Powers and duties. The Working Group shall consider and make~~
2 ~~recommendations on issues involving legislative compensation and benefits,~~
3 ~~staffing, administrative support, and the length of the legislative session,~~
4 ~~including:~~
5 ~~(1) the current compensation and benefits offered to members of the~~
6 ~~General Assembly, including:~~
7 ~~(A) whether current salaries and benefits are sufficient and, if not,~~
8 ~~how they should be increased;~~
9 ~~(B) the impact of current salaries and benefits on recruiting and~~
10 ~~retaining members from diverse backgrounds and life experiences;~~
11 ~~(C) whether supplemental compensation should be provided to~~
12 ~~members who hold leadership positions in addition to the Speaker of the~~
13 ~~House and Senate President Pro Tempore, including caucus leaders and~~
14 ~~committee chairs; and~~
15 ~~(D) how the salaries, benefits, and compensation structure in the~~
16 ~~Vermont General Assembly compare to those of other state legislatures;~~
17 ~~(2) whether changes to staffing are necessary, such as increasing the~~
18 ~~number of legislative staff in existing staff offices, expanding the types of~~
19 ~~legislative staff services available to members, adding caucus staff, and adding~~
20 ~~personal staff or providing members with an allowance to hire their own~~
21 ~~personal staff,~~

1 ~~(2) how to increase the administrative support available to members to~~
2 increase their effectiveness and ability to respond efficiently to the needs of
3 their constituents; and

4 (4) whether changes should be made to the length or structure of the
5 legislative session.

6 (d) Assistance. The Working Group shall have the administrative,
7 technical, and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the
8 Office of Legislative Counsel, and the Joint Fiscal Office.

9 (e) Report. On or before January 15, 2024, the Working Group shall report
10 its findings and recommendations, including any recommendations for
11 legislative action, to the Speaker of the House, the Senate President Pro
12 Tempore, and the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations.
13 Drafts of the Working Group's report shall be confidential unless publicly
14 released.

15 (f) Meetings.

16 (1) The Office of Legislative Operations shall call the first meeting of
17 the Working Group to occur on or before July 1, 2023.

18 (2) The Committee shall select a chair from among its members at the
19 first meeting.

20 (3) A majority of the membership of the Working Group shall constitute
21 a quorum.

1 ~~(4) The Working Group shall cease to exist on January 15, 2024.~~

2 (g) Compensation and reimbursement.

3 (1) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General
4 Assembly, a legislative member of the Working Group shall be entitled to per
5 diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23
6 for not more than eight meetings. These payments shall be made from monies
7 appropriated to the General Assembly.

8 * * Effective Dates * * *

9 Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATES

10 (a) Secs. 1 (health insurance), 2 (expenses for Speaker and President Pro
11 Tempore), and 3(b)–(d) (legislator expenses for meals, lodging, and child,
12 dependent, and elder care) shall take effect on January 1, 2024.

13 (b) Secs. 3(a) (adjournment compensation) and 4 (legislative leave from
14 employment) shall take effect on January 1, 2025.

15 (c) Sec. 5 (Legislative Service Working Group) and this section shall take
16 effect on passage.

** * * Compensation for Legislative Professional Development * * **

Sec. 1. 2 V.S.A. § 23 is amended to read:

*§ 23. STANDING COMMITTEES; AUTHORITY TO MEET; OUT-OF-
STATE BUSINESS*

** * **

(b) For attending to official duties out of the State, or for participating in professional development activities in or out of the State that are directly related to the member's service in the General Assembly, a member shall be

~~entitled to the same per diem compensation as provided for attendance at sessions of the General Assembly. Reimbursement of necessary and actual expenses for official duties out of the State shall be made from the legislative appropriation to any member of the General Assembly or its staff, and reimbursement of necessary and actual expenses for participation in professional development activities shall be made from the legislative appropriation to members of the General Assembly. Such reimbursement and per diem compensation shall be in lieu of any other expenses payable by the State to that person during the period ~~he or she~~ the person is out of the State ~~or participating in professional development activities~~ and shall be contingent upon:~~

~~(1) prior approval of the out-of-state duties or professional development activities by the Speaker of the House in the case of a House member or employee or by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate in the case of a Senator or Senate employee, and~~

~~(2) certification of the expense voucher to the Commissioner of Finance and Management by either the Speaker of the House or President Pro Tempore of the Senate in the appropriate case or designee.~~

~~***~~

~~*** Health Benefits ***~~

~~Sec. 2. 3 V.S.A. § 631 is amended to read:~~

~~§ 631. GROUP INSURANCE FOR STATE EMPLOYEES; SALARY DEDUCTIONS FOR INSURANCE, SAVINGS PLANS, AND CREDIT UNIONS~~

~~(a)(1) The Secretary of Administration may contract on behalf of the State with any insurance company or nonprofit association doing business in this State to secure the benefits of franchise or group insurance. Beginning on July 1, 1978, the terms of coverage under the policy shall be determined under section 904 of this title, but it may include:~~

~~***~~

~~(2)(A)(i) As used in this section, the term "employees" includes any class or classes of elected or appointed officials, State's Attorneys, sheriffs, employees of State's Attorneys' offices whose compensation is administered through the State of Vermont payroll system, except contractual and temporary employees, and deputy sheriffs paid by the State of Vermont pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 290(b). The term "employees" ~~shall~~ does not include members of the General Assembly as such, any person rendering service on a retainer or fee basis, members of boards or commissions, or persons other than employees~~

~~of the Vermont Historical Society, the Vermont Film Corporation, the Vermont State Employees' Credit Union, Vermont State Employees' Association, and the Vermont Council on the Arts, whose compensation for service is not paid from the State Treasury, or any elected or appointed official unless the except as specifically provided pursuant to this subdivision (a)(2)(A)(i). The term "employees" includes employees of the Vermont Historical Society, the Vermont State Employees' Credit Union, the Vermont State Employees' Association, the Vermont Council on the Arts, and any elected or appointed official who is actively engaged in and devoting substantially full-time to the conduct of the business of his or her the official's public office. The term "employees" also includes members of the General Assembly as set forth in subdivision (iv) of this subdivision (a)(2)(A).~~

~~***~~

~~(iv) For purposes of group hospital-surgical-medical expense insurance, any employee assistance program offered to State employees, and any flexible spending account program offered to State employees for health care or dependent care expenses, or both, the term "employees" includes members of the General Assembly.~~

~~(B)(i) The premiums for extending insurance coverage to employees shall be paid in full by the Vermont Historical Society, the Vermont Film Corporation, the Vermont State Employees' Association, the Vermont State Employees' Credit Union, the Vermont Council on the Arts, or their respective retirees. Nothing herein creates a legal obligation on the part of the State of Vermont to pay any portion of the premiums required to extend insurance coverage to this group of employees.~~

~~(ii) Members of the General Assembly shall be required to pay the same portion of the premium for group hospital-surgical-medical expense insurance as is required of employees of the Executive Branch.~~

~~***~~

~~*** Compensation and Expenses ***~~

~~Sec. 3. 32 V.S.A. § 1050 is added to read:~~

~~§ 1050. COMPENSATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY; LEGISLATIVE INTENT~~

~~It is the intent of the General Assembly that its members should receive compensation that is consistent with the amount of the average wage earned in this State.~~

~~Sec. 4. 32 V.S.A. § 1051 is amended to read:~~

~~1051. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE AND PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE
OF THE SENATE; COMPENSATION AND EXPENSE
REIMBURSEMENT~~

~~(a) The Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate shall be entitled to receive annual compensation of \$10,080.00 for the 2005 \$20,716.00 for the first year of the 2025 Biennial Session and thereafter, to be paid in biweekly payments, provided that, beginning on January 1, 2007, the annual compensation shall be adjusted annually thereafter by the cost of living adjustment negotiated for State employees under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, except that, beginning on July 1, 2021. Beginning on January 1, 2026 and annually thereafter on January 1, the annual compensation shall be adjusted consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers. In addition to the annual compensation, the Speaker and President Pro Tempore shall be entitled to receive:~~

~~(1) \$652.00 a week for the 2005 \$1,340.00 a week for the first year of the 2025 Biennial Session and thereafter, to be paid in biweekly payments during the regular and adjourned sessions of the General Assembly, provided that, beginning on January 1, 2007, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted annually thereafter by the cost of living adjustment negotiated for State employees under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, except that, beginning on July 1, 2021 2026 and annually thereafter on January 1, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers;~~

~~* * *~~

~~(3) an allowance for or reimbursement of expenses for mileage; meals; and lodging expenses; and child, dependent, and elder care as provided to members of the General Assembly under subsection 1052(b) of this title during the biennial, adjourned, and special sessions of the General Assembly and in addition such other actual and necessary expenses incurred while engaged in duties imposed by law.~~

~~Sec. 5. 32 V.S.A. § 1052 is amended to read:~~

~~§ 1052. MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY; COMPENSATION
AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT~~

~~(a) Compensation.~~

~~(1) Session compensation. Each member of the General Assembly, other than the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, is entitled to a weekly salary of \$589.00 for the 2005 \$1,210.00 for the first year of the 2025 Biennial Session and thereafter, provided that, beginning on~~

~~January 1, 2007, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted annually thereafter by the cost of living adjustment negotiated for State employees under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, except that, beginning on July 1, 2024 2026 and annually thereafter on January 1, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers. The salary of members shall be paid in biweekly installments.~~

~~(2) Special session compensation. During a special session, a member is entitled to an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection, rounded up to the nearest dollar, for each day of a special session ~~on which the House of which he or she is a~~ that the House in which the member serves shall sit.~~

~~(3) Adjournment compensation.~~

~~(A) During adjournment of the General Assembly, a member is entitled to an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection (a), rounded up to the nearest dollar, for each week of the adjournment of the General Assembly.~~

~~(B) During adjournment of the General Assembly, a member who is serving on a special committee or joint committee shall, in addition to the weekly adjournment compensation set forth in subdivision (A) of this subdivision (3) and the per diem compensation set forth in 2 V.S.A. § 23, be entitled to compensation for time spent preparing for meetings of the special or joint committee at an hourly rate equal to 2.5 percent of the annually adjusted weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection (a).~~

~~(b) Expenses. During any session of the General Assembly, each member is entitled to receive an allowance for or reimbursement of expenses as follows: set forth in this subsection.~~

~~(1) Mileage reimbursement. Reimbursement Each member shall receive reimbursement in an amount equal to the actual mileage traveled for each day of session in which the member travels between Montpelier and the member's home or from Montpelier or from the member's home to another site on officially sanctioned legislative business. Reimbursement of actual mileage traveled under this subdivision shall be at the rate per mile determined by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session.~~

~~(2) Meals and lodging allowance. Each member shall receive either a meals allowance or reimbursement of actual meals expenses. Each member shall inform the Office of Legislative Operations of the member's choice of a meals allowance or meals expense reimbursement annually prior to the~~

~~convening of each regular and adjourned session, and the member's choice shall remain in effect through the remainder of that session unless the member notifies the Office, in writing, that the member needs to change that choice due to a change in circumstances or for another compelling reason.~~

~~(A) Meals allowance. A member who elects to receive a meals allowance shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for meals and lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session, for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.~~

~~(B) Meals reimbursement. A member who elects to receive reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual amounts expended by the member for meals for each day that the House in which the member serves shall sit, as well as meals for the night preceding the first legislative day of each week during the legislative session. The amount of the daily reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision shall not exceed the daily amount for meals determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session. The member shall provide meal receipts or otherwise substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of Legislative Operations in the form and manner prescribed by the Director of Legislative Operations.~~

~~(3) Lodging. Each member shall receive either a lodging allowance or reimbursement of actual lodging expenses. Each member shall inform the Office of Legislative Operations of the member's choice of a lodging allowance or lodging expense reimbursement annually prior to the convening of each regular and adjourned session, and the member's choice shall remain in effect through the remainder of that session unless the member notifies the Office, in writing, that the member needs to change that choice due to a change in circumstances or for another compelling reason.~~

~~(A) Lodging allowance. A member who elects to receive a lodging allowance shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.~~

~~(B) Lodging reimbursement. A member who elects to receive reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual amounts expended by the member for lodging for each day that the House in which the member serves shall sit, as well as lodging for the night preceding the first legislative day of each week during the legislative session. The amount of the daily reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision shall not exceed the daily amount for lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont.~~

~~by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session. The member shall provide lodging receipts or otherwise substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of Legislative Operations in the form and manner prescribed by the Director of Legislative Operations.~~

~~(4) Child, dependent, and elder care reimbursement.~~

~~(A) Each member whose federal taxable household income is at or below \$75,000.00 shall be eligible to receive reimbursement of up to \$1,600.00 of the actual amounts expended by the member in each year of the biennial session for child care, dependent care, or elder care services in this State, or a combination, that is necessary to facilitate the member's service in the General Assembly.~~

~~(B) Expenses shall not be reimbursed under this subdivision (4) to the extent they are being reimbursed or subsidized by another source or if reimbursement or subsidies are reasonably available from another source.~~

~~(C) Each Legislative Branch employee whose federal taxable household income is at or below \$75,000.00 shall also be eligible for reimbursement of up to \$1,600.00 for actual amounts expended by the employee annually for child care, dependent care, or elder care expenses pursuant to this subdivision (4).~~

~~(D) As used in this subdivision (4):~~

~~(i) "Child care" and "dependent care" mean care provided to an individual who would be a qualifying individual for purposes of the federal child and dependent care tax credit.~~

~~(ii) "Elder care" means care provided to an adult 65 years of age or older in the home or in an adult day program.~~

~~(5) Parking. A member who attests that the member's physical limitations make it difficult or impractical for the member to walk from the member's lodging to the State House may receive reimbursement for actual costs incurred for overnight parking for the night preceding each day that the House in which the member serves shall sit.~~

~~(6) Absences. If a member is absent for reasons other than sickness or legislative business for one or more entire days while the house in which the member sits is in session, the member shall notify the Office of Legislative Operations of that absence, and expenses received shall not include the amount that the legislator specifies was not incurred the member shall not be reimbursed for mileage, meals, or lodging expenses incurred during the period of that absence.~~

~~(c) For attending a meeting of the Joint Fiscal Committee when a member is not receiving compensation as a member of the General Assembly, a member of the Joint Fiscal Committee shall be entitled to the same per diem compensation and reimbursement for necessary expenses as provided members of the General Assembly for attendance at sessions of the General Assembly. [Repealed.] Members-elect; stipend. Each member-elect of the General Assembly who is not an incumbent shall receive a stipend in an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (a)(1) of this section, rounded up to the nearest dollar, for each day of attendance at an orientation program for new legislators organized by the General Assembly and its staff.~~

~~(d) Death of a member. If a member of the General Assembly dies while the General Assembly is in session, the estate of the deceased member shall be entitled to receive compensation for the entire pay period in which the death occurred.~~

~~*** Legislative Leave from Employment ***~~

~~Sec. 6. 21 V.S.A. § 496 is amended to read:~~

~~§ 496. LEGISLATIVE LEAVE~~

~~(a) Any person who, in order to serve as a member of the General Assembly, must leave a full-time position in the employ of any employer, shall be entitled to a temporary or partial leave of absence for the purpose of allowing such employee to perform any official duty in connection with his or her the person's elected office.~~

~~(b) An employee who intends to seek election to the General Assembly and to invoke, if elected, his or her the right to a leave of absence pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, shall notify his or her, the employee's employer of those intentions in writing within 10 14 days after filing the primary election nominating petition required by 17 V.S.A. § 2353 or of taking any other action required by 17 V.S.A. chapter 49, to place his or her name on a primary or general election ballot being elected. An employee who fails to give notice to his or her the employee's employer as required by this section shall be deemed to have waived his or her the right to a leave of absence under subsection (a) of this section.~~

~~***~~

~~*** Legislative Service Working Group ***~~

~~Sec. 7. LEGISLATIVE SERVICE WORKING GROUP~~

~~(a) Creation. There is created the Legislative Service Working Group to consider issues related to serving as a member of the Vermont General~~

~~Assembly.~~

~~(b) Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following members:~~

~~(1) three current members of the House of Representatives, not all from the same political party, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House; and~~

~~(2) three current members of the Senate, not all from the same political party, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees.~~

~~(c) Powers and duties. The Working Group shall consider and make recommendations on issues involving legislative compensation and benefits, staffing, administrative support, and the length of the legislative session, including:~~

~~(1) the current compensation and benefits offered to members of the General Assembly, including:~~

~~(A) whether current salaries and benefits are sufficient and, if not, how they should be increased;~~

~~(B) the impact of current salaries and benefits on recruiting and retaining members from diverse backgrounds and life experiences;~~

~~(C) whether members should be offered additional benefits, including reimbursement of child, dependent, and elder care expenses up to the amount of the federal maximum annual household contribution limit for a dependent care flexible spending account;~~

~~(D) whether members should have the option to receive a prorated salary throughout the calendar year instead of receiving their full salary amount during the months that the General Assembly is in session;~~

~~(E) whether supplemental compensation should be provided to members who hold leadership positions in addition to the Speaker of the House and Senate President Pro Tempore, including caucus leaders and committee chairs; and~~

~~(F) how the salaries, benefits, and compensation structure in the Vermont General Assembly compare to those of other state legislatures;~~

~~(2) whether changes to staffing are necessary, such as increasing the number of legislative staff in existing staff offices, expanding the types of legislative staff services available to members, adding caucus staff, and adding personal staff or providing members with an allowance to hire their own personal staff.~~

(3) how to increase the administrative support available to members to increase their effectiveness and ability to respond efficiently to the needs of their constituents; and

(4) whether changes should be made to the length or structure of the legislative session.

(d) Assistance. The Working Group shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the Office of Legislative Counsel, the Office of Human Resources, and the Joint Fiscal Office.

(e) Report. On or before January 15, 2024, the Working Group shall report its findings and recommendations, including any recommendations for legislative action, to the Speaker of the House, the Senate President Pro Tempore, and the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Government Operations. Drafts of the Working Group's report shall be confidential unless publicly released.

(f) Meetings.

(1) The Office of Legislative Operations shall call the first meeting of the Working Group to occur on or before July 1, 2023.

(2) The Committee shall select a chair from among its members at the first meeting.

(3) A majority of the membership of the Working Group shall constitute a quorum.

(4) The Working Group shall cease to exist on January 15, 2024.

(g) Compensation and reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General Assembly, a legislative member of the Working Group shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than eight meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

** * * Appropriation * * **

Sec. 8. APPROPRIATION

The sum of \$875,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Legislature in fiscal year 2024 for the new and expanded benefits for legislators set forth in Secs. 2 (health benefits), 4 (expenses for Speaker and President Pro Tempore), and 5 (legislator expenses) of this act.

** * * Effective Dates * * **

Sec. 9. EFFECTIVE DATES

~~(a) Secs. 6 (legislative leave from employment) and 7 (Legislative Service Working Group) and this section shall take effect on passage.~~

~~(b) Sec. 8 (appropriation) shall take effect on July 1, 2023.~~

~~(c) Secs. 2 (health benefits), 4(a)(3) (expenses for Speaker and President Pro Tempore), and 5(b)-(d) (legislator expenses) shall take effect on January 1, 2024.~~

~~(d) Sec. 1 (compensation for legislative professional development) shall take effect on July 1, 2024.~~

~~(e) The remaining sections shall take effect on January 1, 2025.~~

** * * Health Benefits * * **

Sec. 1. 3 V.S.A. § 631 is amended to read:

§ 631. GROUP INSURANCE FOR STATE EMPLOYEES; SALARY DEDUCTIONS FOR INSURANCE, SAVINGS PLANS, AND CREDIT UNIONS

(a)(1) The Secretary of Administration may contract on behalf of the State with any insurance company or nonprofit association doing business in this State to secure the benefits of franchise or group insurance. Beginning on July 1, 1978, the terms of coverage under the policy shall be determined under section 904 of this title, but it may include:

** * **

(2)(A)(i) As used in this section, the term “employees” includes any class or classes of elected or appointed officials, State’s Attorneys, sheriffs, employees of State’s Attorneys’ offices whose compensation is administered through the State of Vermont payroll system, except contractual and temporary employees, and deputy sheriffs paid by the State of Vermont pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 290(b). The term “employees” shall does not include members of the General Assembly as such, any person rendering service on a retainer or fee basis, members of boards or commissions, or persons other than employees of the Vermont Historical Society, the Vermont Film Corporation, the Vermont State Employees’ Credit Union, Vermont State Employees’ Association, and the Vermont Council on the Arts, whose compensation for service is not paid from the State Treasury, or any elected or appointed official unless the except as specifically provided pursuant to this subdivision (a)(2)(A)(i). The term “employees” includes employees of the Vermont Historical Society, the Vermont State Employees’ Credit Union, the Vermont State Employees’ Association, the Vermont Council on the Arts, and any elected or appointed official who is actively engaged in and devoting substantially full-time to the conduct of the business of his or her the official’s public office. The term

“employees” also includes members of the General Assembly as set forth in subdivision (iv) of this subdivision (a)(2)(A).

* * *

(iv) For purposes of group hospital-surgical-medical expense insurance, any employee assistance program offered to State employees, and any flexible spending account program offered to State employees for health care or dependent care expenses, or both, the term “employees” includes members of the General Assembly.

(B)(i) The premiums for extending insurance coverage to employees shall be paid in full by the Vermont Historical Society, ~~the Vermont Film Corporation~~, the Vermont State Employees’ Association, the Vermont State Employees’ Credit Union, the Vermont Council on the Arts, or their respective retirees. Nothing herein creates a legal obligation on the part of the State of Vermont to pay any portion of the premiums required to extend insurance coverage to this group of employees.

(ii) Members of the General Assembly shall be required to pay the same portion of the premium for group hospital-surgical-medical expense insurance as is required of employees of the Executive Branch.

* * *

* * * Compensation and Expenses * * *

Sec. 2. LEGISLATOR COMPENSATION FOR 2025–2026 BIENNIAL SESSION

(a) Notwithstanding any provision of 32 V.S.A. § 1052 to the contrary, members of the General Assembly other than the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate are entitled to the following weekly salary amounts during the 2025–2026 Biennial Session:

(1) for 2025, a weekly salary of \$1,000.00 plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increase provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal year 2025; and

(2) for 2026, a weekly salary of \$1,100.00 plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal years 2025 and 2026.

(b) Notwithstanding any provision of 32 V.S.A. § 1051 to the contrary, the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate are entitled to the following weekly salary amounts during the 2025–2026 Biennial Session:

(1) for 2025, a weekly salary of \$1,230.00 plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increase provided to other constitutional officers for

fiscal year 2025; and

(2) for 2026, a weekly salary of \$1,530.00 plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal years 2025 and 2026.

(c) Notwithstanding any provision of 32 V.S.A. § 1051 to the contrary, the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate are entitled to annual compensation for the 2025–2026 Biennial Session as follows:

(1) for 2025, an annual salary of \$19,000.00 plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increase provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal year 2025; and

(2) for 2026, an annual salary of \$23,500.00 plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal years 2025 and 2026.

(d) The weekly salary amounts set forth in subsections (a) and (b) of this section shall apply in all circumstances during the 2025–2026 Biennial Session in which legislator compensation is determined pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1051 or 1052, including per diem compensation under 2 V.S.A. § 23, special session compensation, and adjournment compensation.

Sec. 3. 32 V.S.A. § 1051 is amended to read:

§ 1051. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE AND PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE
OF THE SENATE; COMPENSATION AND EXPENSE
REIMBURSEMENT

(a) The Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate shall be entitled to receive annual compensation of \$10,080.00 for the 2005–2006 ~~\$28,300.00 for the first year of the 2027 Biennial Session and thereafter; to be paid in biweekly payments, provided that, beginning on January 1, 2007, the annual compensation shall be adjusted annually thereafter by the cost of living adjustment negotiated for State employees under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, except that, beginning on July 1, 2021, plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal years 2025–2027. Beginning on January 1, 2028 and annually thereafter on January 1, the annual compensation shall be adjusted consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers. The salary of the Speaker and President Pro Tempore shall be paid in biweekly installments.~~

(b) In addition to the annual compensation set forth in subsection (a) of this section, the Speaker and President Pro Tempore shall be entitled to receive:

~~(1) \$652.00 a week for the 2005 \$1,830.00 a week for the first year of the 2027 Biennial Session, plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal years 2025–2027 and thereafter, to be paid in biweekly payments during the regular and adjourned sessions of the General Assembly, provided that, beginning on January 1, 2007, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted annually thereafter by the cost of living adjustment negotiated for State employees under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, except that, beginning on July 1, 2021. Beginning on January 1, 2028 and annually thereafter on January 1, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers;~~

* * *

~~(3) an allowance for or reimbursement of expenses for mileage, meals, and lodging expenses as provided to members of the General Assembly under subsection 1052(b) of this title during the biennial, adjourned, and special sessions of the General Assembly and in addition such other actual and necessary expenses incurred while engaged in duties imposed by law.~~

Sec. 4. 32 V.S.A. § 1052 is amended to read:

§ 1052. MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY; COMPENSATION
AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT

(a) Compensation.

~~(1) Session compensation. Each member of the General Assembly, other than the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, is entitled to a weekly salary of \$589.00 for the 2005 \$1,210.00 for the first year of the 2027 Biennial Session, plus an adjustment consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers for fiscal years 2025–2027 and thereafter; provided that, beginning on January 1, 2007, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted annually thereafter by the cost of living adjustment negotiated for State employees under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, except that, beginning on July 1, 2021. Beginning on January 1, 2028 and annually thereafter on January 1, the weekly compensation shall be adjusted consistent with the compensation increases provided to other constitutional officers. The salary of members shall be paid in biweekly installments.~~

~~(2) Special session compensation. During a special session, a member is entitled to an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection, rounded up to the nearest dollar, for each day of a special session on which the House of which he or she is a that the House in which the member serves shall sit.~~

(3) Adjournment compensation. During adjournment of the General Assembly, a member ~~is entitled to~~ may claim an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection (a), rounded up to the nearest dollar, for each week of the adjournment of the General Assembly.

~~(b) Expenses. During any session of the General Assembly, each member is entitled to receive an allowance for or reimbursement of expenses as follows: set forth in this subsection.~~

~~(1) Mileage reimbursement. Reimbursement Each member shall receive reimbursement in an amount equal to the actual mileage traveled for each day of session in which the member travels between Montpelier and the member's home or from Montpelier or from the member's home to another site on officially sanctioned legislative business. Reimbursement of actual mileage traveled under this subdivision shall be at the rate per mile determined by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session.~~

~~(2) Meals and lodging allowance. Each member shall receive either a meals allowance or reimbursement of actual meals expenses. Each member shall inform the Office of Legislative Operations of the member's choice of a meals allowance or meals expense reimbursement annually prior to the convening of each regular and adjourned session, and the member's choice shall remain in effect through the remainder of that session unless the member notifies the Office, in writing, that the member needs to change that choice due to a change in circumstances or for another compelling reason.~~

~~(A) Meals allowance. ~~A~~ A member who elects to receive a meals allowance ~~in~~ shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for meals ~~and lodging~~ determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session, for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.~~

~~(B) Meals reimbursement. A member who elects to receive reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual amounts expended by the member for meals for each day that the House in which the member serves shall sit, as well as meals for the night preceding the first legislative day of each week during the legislative session. The amount of the daily reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision shall not exceed the daily amount for meals determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session. The member shall provide meal receipts or otherwise substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of Legislative Operations in the form and manner prescribed by the Director of Legislative Operations.~~

~~(3) Lodging. Each member shall receive either a lodging allowance or reimbursement of actual lodging expenses. Each member shall inform the Office of Legislative Operations of the member's choice of a lodging allowance or lodging expense reimbursement annually prior to the convening of each regular and adjourned session, and the member's choice shall remain in effect through the remainder of that session unless the member notifies the Office, in writing, that the member needs to change that choice due to a change in circumstances or for another compelling reason.~~

~~(A) Lodging allowance. A member who elects to receive a lodging allowance shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.~~

~~(B) Lodging reimbursement. A member who elects to receive reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual amounts expended by the member for lodging for each day that the House in which the member serves shall sit, as well as lodging for the night preceding the first legislative day of each week during the legislative session. The amount of the daily reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision shall not exceed the daily amount for lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session. The member shall provide lodging receipts or otherwise substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of Legislative Operations in the form and manner prescribed by the Director of Legislative Operations.~~

~~(4) Absences. If a member is absent for reasons other than a sickness or legislative business for one or more entire days while the house in which the member sits is in session, the member shall notify the Office of Legislative Operations of that absence, and ~~expenses received shall not include the amount that the legislator specifies was not incurred~~ the member shall not be reimbursed for mileage, meals, or lodging expenses incurred during the period of that absence.~~

~~(b) Expenses. During any session of the General Assembly, each member is entitled to receive an allowance for or reimbursement of expenses as follows: set forth in this subsection.~~

~~(1) Mileage reimbursement. ~~Reimbursement~~ Each member shall receive reimbursement in an amount equal to the actual mileage traveled for each day of session in which the member travels between Montpelier and the member's home or from Montpelier or from the member's home to another site on officially sanctioned legislative business. Reimbursement of actual mileage~~

traveled under this subdivision shall be at the rate per mile determined by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session.

(2) ~~Meals and lodging allowance.~~ Each member shall receive either a meals allowance or reimbursement of actual meals expenses. A member shall be presumed to have elected to receive the meals allowance unless the member informs the Office of Legislative Operations prior to the convening of the regular or adjourned session that the member wishes to receive reimbursement of actual meals expenses. A member's election to receive reimbursement of actual meals expenses shall remain in effect through the remainder of that session unless the member notifies the Office, in writing, that the member needs to change to the meals allowance due to a change in circumstances or for another compelling reason.

(A) ~~Meals allowance.~~ A member who elects to receive a meals allowance shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for meals and lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session, for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.

(B) ~~Meals reimbursement.~~ A member who elects to receive reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual amounts expended by the member for meals for each day that the House in which the member serves shall sit, as well as meals for the night preceding the first legislative day of each week during the legislative session; provided, however, that the total amount of the weekly reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision shall not exceed the amount the member would have received for the same week if the member had elected the meals allowance pursuant to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (2). The member shall provide meal receipts or otherwise substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of Legislative Operations in the form and manner prescribed by the Director of Legislative Operations.

(3) ~~Lodging.~~ Each member shall receive either a lodging allowance or reimbursement of actual lodging expenses. A member shall be presumed to have elected to receive the lodging allowance unless the member informs the Office of Legislative Operations prior to the convening of the regular or adjourned session that the member wishes to receive reimbursement of actual lodging expenses. A member's election to receive reimbursement of actual lodging expenses shall remain in effect through the remainder of that session unless the member notifies the Office, in writing, that the member needs to change to the lodging allowance due to a change in circumstances or for another compelling reason.

(A) Lodging allowance. A member who elects to receive a lodging allowance shall receive an amount equal to the daily amount for lodging determined for Montpelier, Vermont, by the federal Office of Government-wide Policy and published in the Federal Register for the year of the session for each day the House in which the member serves shall sit.

(B) Lodging reimbursement. A member who elects to receive reimbursement of expenses shall receive reimbursement equal to the actual amounts expended by the member for lodging for each day that the House in which the member serves shall sit, as well as lodging for the night preceding the first legislative day of each week during the legislative session; provided, however, that the total amount of the weekly reimbursement available pursuant to this subdivision for each week shall not exceed the amount the member would have received for the same week if the member had elected the lodging allowance pursuant to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (3). The member shall provide lodging receipts or otherwise substantiate the amounts expended to the Office of Legislative Operations in the form and manner prescribed by the Director of Legislative Operations.

(4) Absences. If a member is absent for reasons other than sickness or legislative business for one or more entire days while the house in which the member sits is in session, the member shall notify the Office of Legislative Operations of that absence, and ~~expenses received shall not include the amount that the legislator specifies was not incurred the member shall not receive or be reimbursed for mileage, meals, or lodging expenses incurred during the period of that absence.~~

~~(c) For attending a meeting of the Joint Fiscal Committee when a member is not receiving compensation as a member of the General Assembly, a member of the Joint Fiscal Committee shall be entitled to the same per diem compensation and reimbursement for necessary expenses as provided members of the General Assembly for attendance at sessions of the General Assembly. [Repealed.]~~ Members-elect; stipend. Each member-elect of the General Assembly who is not an incumbent shall receive a stipend in an amount equal to one-fifth of the annually adjusted weekly compensation set forth in subdivision (a)(1) of this section, rounded up to the nearest dollar, for each day of attendance at an orientation program for new legislators organized by the General Assembly and its staff.

(d) Death of a member. If a member of the General Assembly dies while the General Assembly is in session, the estate of the deceased member shall be entitled to receive compensation for the entire pay period in which the death occurred.

** * * Legislative Leave from Employment * * **

Sec. 5. 21 V.S.A. § 496 is amended to read:

§ 496. LEGISLATIVE LEAVE

(a) Any person who, in order to serve as a member of the General Assembly, must leave a full-time position in the employ of any employer, shall be entitled to a temporary or partial leave of absence for the purpose of allowing such employee to perform any official duty in connection with his or her the person's elected office.

(b) An employee who intends to seek election to the General Assembly and to invoke, if elected, his or her the right to a leave of absence pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, shall notify his or her the employee's employer of those intentions in writing within 10 14 days after filing the primary election nominating petition required by 17 V.S.A. § 2353 or of taking any other action required by 17 V.S.A. chapter 49, to place his or her name on a primary or general election ballot being elected. An employee who fails to give notice to his or her the employee's employer as required by this section shall be deemed to have waived his or her the right to a leave of absence under subsection (a) of this section.

** * **

** * * Legislative Service Working Group * * **

Sec. 6. LEGISLATIVE SERVICE WORKING GROUP

(a) Creation. There is created the Legislative Service Working Group to consider issues related to serving as a member of the Vermont General Assembly.

(b) Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following members:

(1) three current members of the House of Representatives, not all from the same political party, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

(2) three current members of the Senate, not all from the same political party, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees.

(c) Powers and duties. The Working Group shall consider and make recommendations on issues involving legislative compensation and benefits, staffing, administrative support, and the length of the legislative session, including:

(1) the current compensation and benefits offered to members of the

General Assembly, including:

(A) whether current salaries and benefits, including those added or increased by this act, are sufficient and, if not, how they should be increased;

(B) the impact of current salaries and benefits, including those added or increased by this act, on recruiting and retaining members from diverse backgrounds and life experiences;

(C) the impact of making members eligible for the State employees' health plan as set forth in Sec. 1 of this act on members of different income levels;

~~(D)~~ (D) whether members should be offered additional benefits, including reimbursement of child, dependent, and elder care expenses;

(E) options for establishing or engaging an independent entity to make adjustments to legislative compensation and benefits;

~~(D)~~ ~~(E)~~ (F) whether members should have the option to receive a prorated salary throughout the calendar year instead of receiving their full salary amount during the months that the General Assembly is in session;

~~(E)~~ ~~(F)~~ (G) whether supplemental compensation should be provided to members who hold leadership positions in addition to the Speaker of the House and Senate President Pro Tempore, including caucus leaders and committee chairs; ~~and~~

~~(F)~~ ~~(G)~~ (H) how the salaries, benefits, and compensation structure in the Vermont General Assembly compare to those of other state legislatures; and

(I) how the salaries, benefits, and compensation structure in the Vermont General Assembly compare to the mean and median compensation and benefits of Vermont residents;

(2) whether changes to staffing are necessary, such as increasing the number of legislative staff in existing staff offices, expanding the types of legislative staff services available to members, adding caucus staff, and adding personal staff or providing members with an allowance to hire their own personal staff;

(3) how to increase the administrative support available to members to increase their effectiveness and ability to respond efficiently to the needs of their constituents; and

(4) whether changes should be made to the length or structure of the legislative session.

(d) Assistance. The Working Group shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the Office of Legislative Counsel, the Office of Human Resources, and the Joint Fiscal Office.

(e) Report. On or before January 15, 2024, the Working Group shall report its findings and recommendations, including any recommendations for legislative action, to the Speaker of the House, the Senate President Pro Tempore, and the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Government Operations. ~~Drafts of the Working Group's report shall be confidential unless publicly released.~~ Drafts of the Working Group's report that are in progress but have not yet been shared with the Working Group shall be confidential.

(f) Meetings.

(1) The Office of Legislative Operations shall call the first meeting of the Working Group to occur on or before July 1, 2023.

(2) The Committee shall select a chair from among its members at the first meeting.

(3) A majority of the membership of the Working Group shall constitute a quorum.

(4) The Working Group shall cease to exist on January 15, 2024.

(g) Compensation and reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General Assembly, a legislative member of the Working Group shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than ~~eight~~ six meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

~~*** Appropriation ***~~

~~Sec. 7. APPROPRIATION~~

~~The sum of \$853,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Legislature in fiscal year 2024 for the new and expanded benefits for legislators set forth in Sec. 1 (health benefits) of this act.~~

~~Sec. 7. [Deleted.]~~

~~*** Effective Dates ***~~

~~Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATES~~

~~(a) Secs. 5 (legislative leave from employment) and 6 (Legislative Service Working Group) and this section shall take effect on passage.~~

~~(b) Sec. 7 (appropriation) shall take effect on July 1, 2023.~~

~~(c) Sec. 1 (health benefits), 3(b)(3) (expenses for Speaker and President Pro Tempore), and 4(b)-(d) (legislator expenses) shall take effect on January 1, 2024.~~

(b) Secs. 3(b)(3) (expenses for Speaker and President Pro Tempore) and 4(b)-(d) (legislator expenses) shall take effect on January 1, 2024.

~~(c) Sec. 2 (legislator compensation for 2025-2026 Biennial Session) shall take effect on July 1, 2024.~~

~~(d) The remaining sections shall take effect on January 1, 2025.~~