



**Testimony on Public Hearing - Governor's FY23 Recommended Budget Adjustment  
House Appropriations Committee**

Megan Sullivan, Vice President of Government Affairs  
January 19, 2023

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce is Vermont's largest statewide business organization representing members throughout the state in various industries. The Chamber's mission is to secure an economy conducive to business growth while enhancing the Vermont way of life. It is because of this core mission that the Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports the Governor's FY23 recommended Budget Adjustments that aim to advance Vermont's economy and grow workforce.

**Workforce Recruitment and Retention**

With over 20,000 job openings and not enough Vermonters available to fill them, we need more people. New Americans have always been an important part of Vermont's culture and workforce and continue to be a critical part of Vermont's economic vibrancy. Barriers exist for New Americans seeking employment and we support the Governor's request to fund services to address this to ensure these Vermonters can access opportunities.

**Housing**

Recent graduates and seasoned professionals alike are deterred from working in Vermont due to the statewide supply shortage of suitable housing. In 2016 the Vermont Futures Project determined that the state needed to build 5,000 units of housing a year to meet demand. That figure has now grown to 6,000 per year according to the Vermont Housing Finance Agency. The Vermont Housing Investment Program has provided important investment opportunities to increase the rental housing units available across Vermont and we support the Governor's request for additional funding for this program.

**Rural Capacity**

The federal funds that flowed to Vermont for COVID-19 recovery provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to invest in Vermont's communities and infrastructure. For underserved communities, these funds have remained out of reach due to a lack of staff capacity to find, apply, and administer funds. With a quickly approaching expiration date to obligate and use these funds and there is an urgency to help underserved communities with these existing programs. We request that you support Governor's request for \$3 million in the rural infrastructure program to provide technical assistance for those in underserved communities to have access to the transformative programs this body created during the last biennium.

**Broadband Buildout**

There are areas of Vermont that are unserved by high-speed internet because they either cannot connect to the internet altogether or are served by DSL. Particularly in rural towns, small businesses struggle to keep pace without reliable internet and spotty connections with their customer base, and communities stagnate or shrink because they struggle to attract new residents to a place without reliable internet connection for work and school. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supported the State's application for these competitive funds from NTIA and now supports the Governor's request for \$30 million to leverage these funds through the Budget Adjustment.