

Summary of Strike-all Amendment to S.310
“An act relating to natural disaster government response, recovery, and resiliency”

Part 1. Creation of the Community Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Fund (Secs. 1-4)

This bill incorporates all sections of [S.145](#) (an act relating to the Community Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Fund), except for the findings. These sections create a Community Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Grant Program to be administered by the Department of Public Safety for the purpose of awarding grants for municipal disaster mitigation projects. A \$15,000,000 appropriation will initially stand-up the fund. These sections also increases the amount to be annually allocated to the Emergency Medical Services Special Fund to be increased from \$150,000 to \$300,000.

Part 2. Benefits for Survivors of Public Works Personnel (Secs. 5-6)

This bill incorporates all sections of [S.325](#) (an act relating to survivor benefits for public works employees). These sections create a definition of “first responder” to include public works personnel and water, wastewater, and stormwater personnel, who will be treated akin to traditional emergency-oriented professions, like firefighters and police, for the purposes of emergency response. These sections also increase the monetary benefit to survivors of emergency personnel or public works personnel from up to \$50,000.00 up to \$80,000.00.

Part 3. Emergency Management (Secs. 7-12)

These sections codify the State Emergency Management Plan as created and annually updated by the Department of Public Safety’s Vermont Emergency Management Division. These will clarify that local and regional emergency planning organizations shall follow the State Emergency Management Plan and guidance set forth by the Division of Emergency Management, including how to site shelters. Representatives from local libraries and arts and culture organizations have been added to the list of nonvoting members of regional emergency management committees.

These sections incorporate Secs. 14, 15, and 18 of [H.723](#) (an act relating to flood recovery), and all of [S. 223](#) (an act relating to the assessment of the Vermont Emergency Management Division’s disaster preparedness). This section requires the Department of Public Safety’s Division of Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) to perform an “after action review.” In addition to the federal Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program’s requirements, the review may include examining the adequacy of early warning and evacuation orders, designated evacuation routes and emergency shelters, the present system of local emergency management directors in wide-spread emergencies and the State’s present emergency communications systems. VEM will also publish best management practices for rebuilding after emergencies and report back to both the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations on both the outcome of the review and the best management practices.

These sections also create three new Regional Emergency Management Program Coordinators appropriate \$500,000 to fund a total of five position (two currently exist).

Part 3. Municipal Stormwater Utilities (Secs. 13-15)

This bill incorporates elements of [S.243](#) (an act relating to the formation of stormwater utility districts). These sections modify how stormwater rates are assessed and how the associated revenue may be used. Sewage system commissioners may now set stormwater rates for equivalent residential units based on an average area of impervious surface on residential property within the municipality. Revenues may be used for stormwater management, control, and treatment; flood resiliency; floodplain restoration; and other similar measures. These sections also permit municipalities to jointly apply for grants from the Agency of Natural Resources to support stormwater utility operations.

Part 4. Creation of the Urban Search and Rescue Team (Sec. 16)

This bill incorporates Sec. 6 of [H.627](#) (an act relating to emergency preparedness and hazard response). This section will create the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team within the Department of Public Safety and allocate \$750,000.00 annually to the Department of Public Safety to facilitate the operations of the USAR Team.

Part 5. Vermont-211 Information Privacy (Sec. 17)

This section requires Vermont 211 to keep confidential any personal information acquired from victims of natural disasters except for coordinating relief work for affected individuals.

Part 7. Emergency Communications (Sec. 18-20)

These sections require VEM, in consultation with the Enhanced E-911 Board, to develop a policy using E-911 to provide more effective VT-Alerts in large emergencies. These will modernize statutory language so that “originating carriers” are required to provide location and caller data in accordance with current 911 standards. Originating carriers must also notify their customers of outages impacting communication with 911 or receiving emergency notifications. These sections will also require the Enhanced 911 Board, in consultation with the Public Utilities Commission, to evaluate and report on the current tariffs for service elements necessary for the provision of Enhanced 911 services.

Part 8. Language Assistance Services for State Emergency Communications (Secs. 21-23)

These sections require VEM to ensure language assistance services are being provided to individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind and to individuals with limited English proficiency for all State emergency communications. These appropriate \$15,000 for improving State Police radio communications and \$25,000 for outreach to increase VT Alert registration and emergency preparedness. These sections also create the “Language Assistance Services for Emergency Communications Working Group” to develop and report on best practices for the distribution of language assistance services on mass communication platforms to ensure emergency communications are being effectively delivered to individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind and to individuals with limited English language proficiency.

Part 9. Creation of Chief Climate Resilience Officer (Sec. 24)

This section creates a Chief Climate Resilience Officer who shall directly report to the Governor. \$150,000.00 is appropriated for this.

Part 10. Post-Secondary Disaster Management Programs (Sec. 25)

This section will require the Vermont State University and the President or designee for the University of Vermont report on potentially creating post-secondary disaster management programs.

Part 11. Emergency Powers of the Governor and Emergency Management (Secs. 26-36)

These sections remove various instances of catch-all language in the Governor’s emergency powers so that the powers are limited to the scope of each statutory section. These tie the sections regarding the accepting of gifts, grants, and loans during emergencies to the regular statutory process for doing so (32 V.S.A. § 5), which includes an expedited process. These change who may appointment some members of the State Emergency Response Commission. These also bring terminology into conformance across statutory sections (e.g. “proclaim” versus “declare” an emergency).

Part 12. Continuing Local Economic Damage Grant Program and Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (Secs. 37-38)

These sections create a “Continuing Local Economic Damage Grant Program,” based on similar grants created in [H.839](#) (an act relating to fiscal year 2024 budget adjustments), to support municipalities that were impacted by the August and December 2023 flooding events. \$200,000 is appropriated to stand up this program. These sections will also transfer \$830,000 from the General Fund to the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund.

Part 13. Effective Date (Sec. 39)

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2024, except Sec. 21, which will take effect on July 1, 2025 'to allow the Working Group’s report to be issued before the language assistance services requirements of 20 V.S.A. § 4 take effect.