

Journal of the House

Friday, April 18, 2025

At nine o'clock and thirty minutes in the forenoon, the Speaker called the House to order.

Devotional Exercises

Devotional exercises were conducted by Rep. Mary-Katherine Stone of Burlington.

Bill Referred to Committee on Ways and Means

H. 364

House bill, entitled

An act relating to approval of the annexation of property by the Village of Swanton

Appearing on the Notice Calendar, and pursuant to House Rule 35(a), materially affecting the revenue of one or more municipalities, was referred to the Committee on Ways and Means.

Ceremonial Reading

H.C.R. 56

Offered by All Members of the House

House concurrent resolution designating April 18, 2025 as USS VERMONT (SSN 792) Day in Vermont

Whereas, the U.S. submarine VERMONT (USS VERMONT) (SSN 792) was commissioned on April 18, 2020, and is the third United States Naval Vessel to carry the State of Vermont namesake, and

Whereas, the officers and crew of the USS VERMONT (SSN 792) are currently deployed in the Western Pacific and are making port in South Korea and Japan, strengthening military cooperation with our allies, and

Whereas, the USS VERMONT (SSN 792) plays a leading role in the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) Trilateral Security Partnership, and it awarded the first Royal Australian officer his U.S. Navy Submarine Warfare Insignia (Dolphin), while he was serving on the USS VERMONT (SSN 792), and

Whereas, the U.S. Navy has recognized the crew of the USS VERMONT (SSN 792) with the 2024 Squadron One Battle Readiness Award (Battle E), and awards for engineering readiness, electronic warfare, supply readiness, and personnel readiness, further honoring their namesake with sustained superior performance, and

Whereas, the officers and crew of the USS VERMONT (SSN 792) honor Vermont lore with “Champy” patches on their shoulders and our “Freedom & Unity” motto in their emblems as they serve to protect our country and its freedoms, *now therefore be it*

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly designates April 18, 2025 as USS VERMONT (SSN 792) Day in Vermont, *now therefore be it*

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the Commanding Officer of the USS VERMONT and the USS VERMONT Support Group.

Having been adopted in concurrence on Friday, March 21, 2025 in accord with Joint Rule 16b, was read.

Ceremonial Reading

H.C.R. 58

Offered by Representative Noyes of Wolcott

Offered by Senator Westman

House concurrent resolution recognizing April 18, 2025 as Electric Utility Lineworker Appreciation Day in Vermont

Whereas, in the 21st century, electric power, which is overwhelmingly transmitted through openly exposed local and long-distance electric power transmission lines, is essential for all aspects of daily living, and

Whereas, when lightning, snow, wind, and other variants of disruptive weather strike, the electric power lines are often damaged, posing an immediate danger to persons who encounter the wires and disrupting the flow of electric power to neighborhoods, entire municipalities, and even large sections of the State, including vital health and public safety facilities, and

Whereas, these electric power disruptions trigger the response of the dedicated men and women who are employees of Vermont’s cooperative, investor-owned, and municipal utilities, the organizations that, for decades, have striven to provide all Vermonters with reliable, safe, and, in more recent years, increasingly environmentally friendly electric power, and

Whereas, these electric utility employees must work extended hours, under extremely dangerous conditions that require the utmost degree of care and professionalism, in a time-pressured effort to restore electric power expeditiously and eliminate dangerous hazards on the landscape and byways of the State, and

Whereas, these individuals are truly unsung heroes, whose impact on our daily lives is often forgotten and underappreciated, and

Whereas, across the country, April 18 is annually observed as National Lineman Appreciation Day, and a Vermont commemoration is in order, *now therefore be it*

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly recognizes April 18, 2025 as Electric Utility Lineworker Appreciation Day in Vermont, *and be it further*

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to each of the cooperative, investor-owned, and municipal electric utilities in Vermont.

Having been adopted in concurrence on Friday, March 21, 2025 in accord with Joint Rule 16b, was read.

Third Reading;

Bill Passed in Concurrence with Proposal of Amendment

S. 28

Senate bill, entitled

An act relating to access to certain legally protected health care services

Was taken up, read the third time, and passed in concurrence with proposal of amendment.

Second Reading; Proposal of Amendment Agreed to;

Third Reading Ordered

S. 27

Rep. Page of Newport City, for the Committee on Health Care, to which had been referred Senate bill, entitled

An act relating to medical debt relief and excluding medical debt from credit reports

Reported in favor of its passage in concurrence with proposal of amendment by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

Sec. 1. STATE TREASURER; MEDICAL DEBT RELIEF;

APPROPRIATION

(a) The sum of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated to the State Treasurer from the General Fund in fiscal year 2026 for the purpose of contracting with a nonprofit entity to acquire and repay certain medical debts incurred by Vermont residents as set forth in this section.

(b) The State Treasurer shall ensure that the entity with which the Treasurer contracts under this section will:

(1) purchase the medical debt of eligible debtors from health care providers at fair market value;

(2) abolish the debt with no cost or tax consequences for the debtor;

(3) coordinate with the health care provider or collections agency to ensure that any adverse information resulting from the medical debt is removed from the debtor's consumer credit report following the contractor's purchase and abolition of the debt; and

(4) notify each individual whose medical debt was abolished pursuant to this section:

(A) the amount of the individual's medical debt that was abolished and the name of the health care provider or providers from whom the entity purchased the individual's debt;

(B) the estimated percentage of the federal poverty level that corresponds to the individual's household income; and

(C) that financial assistance policies are available at all Vermont hospitals in accordance with 18 V.S.A. § 9482, including the following minimum discounts:

(i) a 100 percent discount for individuals with household income at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty level; and

(ii) at least a 40 percent discount for individuals with household income between 250 and 400 percent of the federal poverty level.

(c) In order to be eligible for repayment of medical debt under this section, the following conditions must be met:

(1) the debtor shall be a Vermont resident who either has a household income that is at or below 400 percent of the federal poverty level for the applicable household size or who owes medical debt in an amount that is five percent or more of the debtor's household income; and

(2) the debtor's patient account still maintains an outstanding balance even after the health care provider has completed its routine efforts to collect the amounts due.

Sec. 2. 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 83, Sec. 53(b)(5)(B), as amended by 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 185, Sec. C.102 and 2023 Acts and Resolves No. 78, Sec. E.1000, is further amended to read:

(B) ~~\$20,000,000~~ \$19,000,000 shall be appropriated to the State Treasurer's Office and used for redeeming State of Vermont general obligation bonds prior to maturity.

Sec. 3. 9 V.S.A. § 2466d is added to read:

§ 2466d. REPORTING OF MEDICAL DEBT INFORMATION

PROHIBITED

(a) A credit reporting agency shall not report or maintain in the file on a consumer information relating to a medical debt.

(b) As used in this section:

(1) "Health care services" means services for the diagnosis, prevention, treatment, cure, or relief of a physical, dental, behavioral, or mental health condition or substance use disorder, including counseling, procedures, products, devices, and medications.

(2) "Medical debt" means debt arising from health care services, including dental services, or from health care goods, including products, devices, durable medical equipment, and prescription drugs. "Medical debt" does not include debt arising from services provided by a veterinarian; debt charged to a credit card unless the credit card is issued under an open-end or closed-end credit plan offered solely for the payment of health care services; debt charged to a home equity or general-purpose line of credit; or secured debt.

Sec. 4. 9 V.S.A. § 2480b is amended to read:

§ 2480b. DISCLOSURES TO CONSUMERS

* * *

(c) Any time a credit reporting agency is required to make a written disclosure to consumers pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1681g, it shall disclose, in at least 12-point type, and in bold type as indicated, the following notice:

"NOTICE TO VERMONT CONSUMERS

* * *

(2) Under Vermont law, no one may access your credit report without your permission except under the following limited circumstances:

* * *

(F) where the request for a credit report is related to a credit transaction entered into prior to January 1, 1993; or

(G) where the request for a credit report is by the Vermont Department of Taxes and is used for the purpose of collecting or investigating delinquent taxes; or

(H) where the request for a credit report is by an organization that is exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code for the purpose of determining eligibility for the abolition of medical debt.

* * *

Sec. 5. 9 V.S.A. § 2480g is amended to read:

§ 2480g. EXEMPTIONS

* * *

(e) The provisions of section 2480e of this title shall not apply to an organization that is exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code when determining eligibility for the abolition of medical debt; provided, however, that the exemption from the provisions of section 2480e of this title shall not apply to a tax-exempt organization that is a large health care facility, as defined in 18 V.S.A. § 9481.

Sec. 6. 18 V.S.A. chapter 221, subchapter 10 is amended to read:

Subchapter 10. Patient Financial Assistance and Medical Debt

* * *

§ 9485. PROHIBITION ON SALE OR REPORTING OF MEDICAL DEBT

(a)(1) No large health care facility shall sell its medical debt except as provided in subdivision (2) of this subsection.

(2) A large health care facility may sell or otherwise transfer its medical debt to an organization that is exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code for the specific purpose of the tax-exempt organization abolishing the medical debt of one or more patients by cancellation of the indebtedness.

(b) No large health care facility or medical debt collector shall report or otherwise furnish any portion of a medical debt to a credit reporting agency.

* * *

Sec. 7. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

Rep. Nigro of Bennington, for the Committee on Appropriations, recommended that the bill pass in concurrence with proposal of amendment as recommended by the Committee on Health Care.

Rep. Feltus of Lyndon, for the Committee on Ways and Means, recommended that the bill pass in concurrence with proposal of amendment as recommended by the Committee on Health Care.

The bill, having appeared on the Notice Calendar, was taken up and read the second time.

Pending the question, Shall the House propose to the Senate to amend the bill as recommended by the Committee on Health Care?, **Reps. Black of Essex, Berbeco of Winooski, Cina of Burlington Cordes of Bristol, Critchlow of Colchester, Demar of Enosburgh, Goldman of Rockingham, Houghton of Essex Junction, McFaun of Barre Town, Page of Newport City, and Powers of Waterford** moved to amend the report of the Committee on Health Care in Sec. 3, 9 V.S.A. § 2466d, in subsection (b), by striking out subdivision (1) in its entirety and inserting in lieu thereof a new subdivision (1) to read as follows:

(1) “Health care services” means all supplies, care, and services of a medical, dental, behavioral health, mental health, substance use disorder treatment, surgical, psychiatric, therapeutic, diagnostic, preventative, rehabilitative, or supportive nature, including medication.

Which was agreed to.

Pending the question, Shall the House propose to the Senate to amend the bill as recommended by the Committee on Health Care, as amended?, **Reps. Donahue of Northfield and Black of Essex** moved to further amend the report of the Committee on Health Care by adding a new section to be Sec. 3 to read as follows:

Sec. 3. 1 V.S.A. § 151 is added to read:

§ 151. BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

“Behavioral health” means any behavioral condition bearing on health, including stress-linked physical symptoms, patient activation, and health behaviors that can be addressed through support, counseling, change techniques, coaching, and other interventions. As used in the Vermont Statutes Annotated, the term does not include mental health conditions or substance use disorders. The General Assembly recognizes that using the term “behavioral

health” to describe mental health conditions or substance use disorders has a stigmatizing impact, which may deter individuals from seeking health care for those conditions, but also recognizes that some jurisdictions interpret the term to incorporate those conditions and that therefore it may be necessary under limited circumstances to include the term in the definition of health care services for the sole reason of avoiding any question about the intended scope of a specific statute.

and by renumbering the remaining sections to be numerically correct

Which was agreed to. Thereafter, the report of the Committee on Health Care, as amended, was agreed to, and third reading ordered.

Adjournment

At ten o'clock and forty minutes in the forenoon, on motion of **Rep. McCoy of Poultney**, the House adjourned until Tuesday, April 22, 2025, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, pursuant to the provisions of J.R.S. 22.

Message from the Senate No. 43

A message was received from the Senate by Ms. Gradel, its Assistant Secretary, as follows:

Madam Speaker:

I am directed to inform the House that:

The Senate has considered House proposals of amendment to Senate bills of the following titles:

S. 9. An act relating to after-hours access to orders against sexual assault.

S. 30. An act relating to updating and reorganizing the health insurance statutes in 8 V.S.A. chapter 107.

And has concurred therein.

The Senate has considered a bill originating in the House of the following title:

H. 118. An act relating to expanding the scope of hate-motivated crimes.

And has passed the same in concurrence.

The Senate has on its part adopted concurrent resolutions originating in the House of the following titles:

H.C.R. 95. House concurrent resolution designating April 24, 2025 as Vermont Children's Alliance Day at the State House.

H.C.R. 96. House concurrent resolution congratulating the Thetford Academy Panthers Division III boys' basketball team on their second consecutive championship.

H.C.R. 97. House concurrent resolution congratulating the Southern State Correctional Facility's debate team on its National Prison Debate League victory over Wake Forest University.

H.C.R. 98. House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Essex High School Hornets Division I championship girls' ice hockey team.

H.C.R. 99. House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Mount Mansfield Union High School Cougars boys' Division I championship Nordic ski team.

H.C.R. 100. House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Mount Mansfield Union High School Cougars Division I championship girls' Nordic ski team.

H.C.R. 101. House concurrent resolution congratulating Phoenix Newell on winning two consecutive Vermont State Spelling Bees.

H.C.R. 102. House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2024 8–10 Colchester All-Star Vermont championship Little League Baseball team.

H.C.R. 103. House concurrent resolution commemorating the establishment of the Austine School for the Deaf collection and exhibit at the Vermont Historical Society Library in Barre.

H.C.R. 104. House concurrent resolution recognizing May 2025 as National Foster Care Month in Vermont.

H.C.R. 105. House concurrent resolution recognizing April 19, 2025 as World Circus Day in Vermont.

H.C.R. 106. House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Mount Mansfield Union High School Cougars dance program on winning a 10th consecutive hip-hop State championship.

H.C.R. 107. House concurrent resolution congratulating the Rice Memorial High School Green Knights boys' ice hockey team on winning a second consecutive Division I championship.

H.C.R. 108. House concurrent resolution congratulating the remarkable four-time State high school individual girls' golf champion Namo Seibert.

Concurrent Resolutions Adopted

The following concurrent resolutions, having been placed on the Consent Calendar on the preceding legislative day, and no member having requested floor consideration as provided by Rule 16b of the Joint Rules of the Senate and House of Representatives, are hereby adopted on the part of the House:

H.C.R. 95

House concurrent resolution designating April 24, 2025 as Vermont Children's Alliance Day at the State House

H.C.R. 96

House concurrent resolution congratulating the Thetford Academy Panthers Division III boys' basketball team on their second consecutive championship

H.C.R. 97

House concurrent resolution congratulating the Southern State Correctional Facility's debate team on its National Prison Debate League victory over Wake Forest University

H.C.R. 98

House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Essex High School Hornets Division I championship girls' ice hockey team

H.C.R. 99

House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Mount Mansfield Union High School Cougars boys' Division I championship Nordic ski team

H.C.R. 100

House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Mount Mansfield Union High School Cougars Division I championship girls' Nordic ski team

H.C.R. 101

House concurrent resolution congratulating Phoenix Newell on winning two consecutive Vermont State Spelling Bees

H.C.R. 102

House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2024 8–10 Colchester All-Star Vermont championship Little League Baseball team

H.C.R. 103

House concurrent resolution commemorating the establishment of the Austine School for the Deaf collection and exhibit at the Vermont Historical Society Library in Barre

H.C.R. 104

House concurrent resolution recognizing May 2025 as National Foster Care Month in Vermont

H.C.R. 105

House concurrent resolution recognizing April 19, 2025 as World Circus Day in Vermont

H.C.R. 106

House concurrent resolution congratulating the 2025 Mount Mansfield Union High School Cougars dance program on winning a 10th consecutive hip-hop State championship

H.C.R. 107

House concurrent resolution congratulating the Rice Memorial High School Green Knights boys' ice hockey team on winning a second consecutive Division I championship

H.C.R. 108

House concurrent resolution congratulating the remarkable four-time State high school individual girls' golf champion Namo Seibert

[The full text of the concurrent resolutions appeared in the House Calendar Addendum on the preceding legislative day and will appear in the Public Acts and Resolves of the 2025 Biennial Session.]