

April 8, 2025

Dear House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development,

I am writing to you today to encourage you to support S.122, an act relating to economic and workforce development. Vermont Works for Women promotes economic justice by supporting women at every stage of their career journeys so that they may make confident and deliberate choices about life and work. This support includes statewide employment and career direct services, access to a wealth of career resources, and a career mentoring program.

As women lost employment and/or had to return home to care for their children during the pandemic, Vermont Works for Women experienced an increase in women looking for guidance and support to take control of their careers by starting their own business. The Vermont Women's Fund *This Way Up* survey (2021-2023) that reached over 3400 women business owners validated our experience by showing that while 23% of respondents chose to start a business due to lost employment, less than 2% utilized available Vermont resources and 17% lacked mentors. Additionally, 77% felt ready to mentor and had a desire to connect with industry networks and someone experienced who could guide them through challenges. 90% said they wanted a support network of fellow leaders. To support these women, we turned to our volunteer career mentors who provided 1:1 support and referred them to our partner organizations that provide more in-depth services and learning opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs in Vermont. We, along with our partner organizations, often find ourselves acting as human switchboards – directing and redirecting individuals to the right organization(s) based on individuals' current needs.

Through a partnership, which includes Center for Women and Enterprise, CVOEO Financial Futures, Mercy Connections, Vermont Professionals of Color, Vermont Womenpreneurs, and Vermont Women's Fund, we recognized an opportunity to work more collaboratively, efficiently and cost effectively for not only the service organizations, but also for the budding or established business owner searching for information and support. Each organization offers complementary yet unique sets of services, programs, and events for a shared target audience. Together, we are committed to collaborating on creating a platform for our constituents to access the resources and connections they need to succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

With the legislature's support we can remove barriers to connection and create opportunities, resources, and support systems that are within reach of and empower Vermont's growing small business owners and entrepreneurs at all stages of their entrepreneurial journey. Thank you for considering this request, and we welcome the opportunity to share more information and answer additional questions you may have.

With gratitude,



Rhoni Basden, Executive Director of Vermont Works for Women