

## Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs

---

### S. 173 - An act relating to vocational rehabilitation (2/20)

#### Bill Summary - S.173

- Removes the previous screening-first model and instead routes injured workers directly to a certified vocational rehabilitation counselor.
- Requires clear rights disclosures and allows workers to self-initiate services if their employer fails to act within 90 days.
- Creates a working group to study further improvements to the vocational rehab system, with a report due to the House Commerce and Senate EDHGA by December 2026.
- Establishes a state-funded mediator position within the Vermont Labor Relations Board to provide free mediation services during collective bargaining impasses, appropriating \$115,000 for FY2027.

#### Discussion & Questions

- Some discussion on whether the Governor should be able to appoint members of the working group. The committee decided not to include the Governor as an appointer.
  - Members of the working group will be appointed by the Speaker of the House and the Committee of Committees.
  - **Concerns from earlier discussion**
    - Cost of removing the screening process might be high and lead to more people using VR services than necessary. Counter to the argument: the underutilization of VR by people who genuinely need it is a larger issue.
  - **The specific concern for the house to address:** Will removing the screening process actually save money in the system or will it lead more people to use more expensive VR services than they need?
-

## H. 639 - Genetic Data Privacy

### Discussion & Questions

- **De-identification:** Once data is de-identified, it falls outside the bill's protections. Sen. Clarkson raised whether that creates a gap for research, and the committee sentiment was positive but they wanted a privacy expert to weigh in
- **Interstate differences:** Sen. Brock questioned the burden of companies navigating 50 different state privacy laws, and Sen. Chittenden raised the concern: what happens when a Vermonter moves to a state without these privacy protections?
- **Law enforcement access:** Sen. Weeks noted that genetic and biometric data is important for law enforcement and intelligence. Committee wants Vermont State Police in to confirm that the warrant requirement language doesn't create unintended problems.
- **Healthcare:** Sen. Chittenden raised the question of whether patients should have the same rights with their doctors that consumers have with testing companies.

---

## H. 512 - Event Ticketing

### Discussion & Questions

- **Individual resellers:** Questions around the bill technically applying to anyone, including a person selling a single ticket to a friend. Sen. Chittenden noted this as something the Senate should revisit. It was noted that the AG likely wouldn't chase individuals, but theoretically there could be private cases.
- **Platform regulation:** Sen. Chittenden identified that if you resell at 110% but the platform (StubHub, etc.) takes a cut, you could net less than your original purchase price. The bill doesn't regulate what platforms charge, only what resellers can charge buyers.
- **Reseller status:** Sen. Chittenden questioned when Ticketmaster acts as a primary seller vs. a reseller, since it functions as both depending on context. That distinction matters for whether the cap applies.
- **The cap number:** Both Sen. Weeks and Sen. Chittenden questioned how that figure (110%) was chosen. Legislative Counsel will create a comparison of what other jurisdictions have enacted.

Both H.512 and H.639 are going to need more follow-up for certainty from the committee.

---

## H.548 - Labor Relations

Rep. Conor Casey introduced H.548, which would create a state labor mediator position housed under the Vermont Labor Relations Board. The bill is based on the Trump administration's cutting of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) from 147 mediators to 6. Additionally, Vermont's longtime FMCS contact was let go last April.

### **Discussion & Questions:**

- **Cost:** Private mediators run ~\$450/hour including travel and prep. A full-time in-house mediator would likely be cheaper and would build institutional knowledge of Vermont's contracts and parties, something the FMCS had developed over years.
- **Utilization question:** Senators Brock and Weeks questioned the possibility of a full-time employee having too light a workload. Rep. Casey estimated there to be a double-digit number of cases annually, 10% of contracts that can't resolve without help. Vermont State Colleges system cited 10 out of 16 negotiations going to mediation over recent years.
- **Contractor vs. full-time employees:** Debated but unresolved. Sen. Brock noted you don't want a full-time employee with no cases to mediate.
- **Confidentiality:** A new subdivision was added requiring the VLRB to develop policies insulating mediation communications from board members and other staff, critical for maintaining mediator neutrality.
- **Appropriation:** \$250,000 for two positions, a mediator, and a staff attorney for the VLRB, which currently operates with essentially 1.5 staff administering 7 labor statutes.

---

## H.775 - Rural Financing

H.775 is a six-part housing finance bill designed to address financing gaps in rural Vermont where existing tools fall short. Framed as: CHIP was oversold for rural Vermont. Small projects with five units can't make tax-increment financing work, and small towns lack the capacity to navigate complex financing structures.

### **Bill components:**

1. **Special Assessment Revenue Bonds:** Allows municipalities to issue revenue bonds (backed only by assessment revenues) with only property owners on the hook needing to vote. This addresses instances where opponents of a development used a bond vote to kill projects even after Select Boards approved them.
2. **Modular/Manufactured Home Accelerator:** Uses the state treasurer's 10% for Vermont program (expanded to 12.5%, with an additional 1% credit facility) for bulk purchasing of off-site constructed housing.

3. **VHIP Pre-Funding:** Currently the VHIP program requires landlords to advance their own money and get reimbursed. This gives DHCD explicit statutory authority to front the money for capital-constrained projects.
4. **VEDA Expansion:** Allows the Vermont Economic Development Authority to finance multifamily residential.
5. **Treasurer's 10% for Vermont Expansion:** Raises the cap from 10% to 12.5% of state cash balance available for low-interest housing loans, with an additional 1% credit facility for off-site construction bulk purchasing.
6. **Municipal Housing Targets Reporting:** Asks municipalities to incorporate state housing targets into their land use plans, and if they can't meet targets, to report back to DHCD explaining why.

The committee flagged that S.328 (their housing bill passed last Friday) has overlapping sections with different language. Legislative Counsel committed to producing a side-by-side comparison.