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## WEEKLY REPORT

8:45 AM, February 14, 2025, Room 35

Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs

### I. New Bills in Committee

A. H.34 – An act relating to workforce leadership in Vermont

### II. Meetings and Key Points

#### A. PR.3 Right to Collectively Bargain

- A proposal to amend the VT constitution to include employee right to organize and collectively bargain – passed last spring session
  - Does not change current employment laws; enshrines them in the constitution
  - Based on Illinois constitutional amendment
- Sen. Chittenden: Has this increased unionization in Illinois?
  - Sean Scott (Director of Government Affairs, Laborers' International Union of N.A. Midwest Region): No, but protects against its erosion. It's also still early to evaluate its effects; it's only been two years.
- Support vocalized by Senators Chittenden, Clarkson, Ram Hinsdale and Brock

- Vote on proposal delayed to allow sufficient time for members of the community to testify

#### B. Housing Construction Update

- Testimony from VHFA and ACCD indicating that off site construction and manufactured homes increase the efficiency of affordable housing development
  - Jeff Lubel (Housing Policy Consultant): Off site construction would create 80-100 jobs, increase volume and speed of building and lower costs
    - However, labor shortages are a challenge
  - Nate Formalarie (ACCD): Cost of occupancy of manufactured homes (rental of lot + mortgage on home) is considerably less than the cost for a normal home
    - Sen. Brock requested specific numbers
  - Maura Collins (VHFA): Recommended state-wide building codes to increase efficiency of manufactured homes projects and decrease costs
    - Asked for a summer study committee on state-wide codes

#### C. SPARC

- Testimony from Joan Goldstein (Commissioner, Department of Economic Development) and Jessica Hartleben (Executive Director, Vermont Economic Progress Council)

- Sen. Ram Hinsdale: Expressed that she would not support SPARC proposal unless density and number of housing units meet five-year housing goals for municipalities
  - Has discussed a density algorithm with Commissioner Farrell of Department of Housing and Community Development
  - Expressed that state's interest should be in over building infrastructure for the future
- Sen. Weeks: Expressed that he likes the SPARC concept, but agrees with Sen. Ram Hinsdale on density

#### D. BIPOC Business Updates

- Testimony from Weiwei Wang (Co Founder and Executive Director, Vermont Professionals of Color Network)
  - Most recent Lunch with Lenders had 19 lenders and 9 languages represented
  - Current outreach primarily takes place in Northeast VT; Goal is to expand to other regions
- Ask: \$250,000 two-year contract repeated plus an additional \$100,000 one-time grant for full time business support services staff

#### E. Film and the Creative Economy

- Testimony from Vermont Arts Council, Catamount Arts and local artists
  - Film and Creative Media Workforce Development
    - VT will not try to compete in the large-scale film industry, but should facilitate small-scale film-making

- Vermont needs a centralized database for film and media infrastructure, resources and information, including a person to answer phone calls
- Sen. Chittenden: Vermont needs a larger indoor venue for the performing arts

#### F. Economic Development: Expanded Trade Offices

- Testimony from ACCD and DED
  - CIDEP
    - Business attracted to Vermont primarily from Québec
    - Total of five international companies attracted to Vermont through CIDEP recruitment pipeline
    - In the process of looking for facilities for three other companies
    - Asking for \$350,000 to expand outreach to Asia and Northern Europe
      - Enthusiasm from the committee around expanding to Asia
      - Committee requested language ASAP to move forward

#### G. Microbusinesses

- Testimony from Liz Scharf, Director of Community Economic Development and Food Security, Capstone Community Action

- Requested increase of \$87,000 on base funding for FY26 to cover increased cost of living and to add a full-time business counselor to address demand for services
- Budget is primarily dedicated to employing staff

#### H. Housing Development (ADUs)

- VHIP 2.0 proposal
  - Requesting to make the pilot into a permanent program and to transition from one-time funding to base funding (included in Gov. Scott's budget proposal)
  - End of compliance period for pilot program coming this year; this will be the opportunity for them to assess post-compliance impact
    - Sen. Clarkson: Posed the question of a tax-incentive to keep rent at HUD fair market level
    - VHIP beginning outreach to owners to get a sense of post-compliance period plans