

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs to which
3 was referred House Bill No. 397 entitled “An act relating to miscellaneous
4 amendments to the statutes governing emergency management and flood
5 response” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends
6 that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and
7 inserting in lieu thereof the following:

8 * * * Division of Emergency Management; Plans and Reports * * *

9 Sec. 1. 20 V.S.A. § 3a is amended to read:

10 § 3a. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION; DUTIES; BUDGET

11 (a) In addition to other duties required by law, the Division of Emergency
12 Management shall:

13 * * *

14 (3) Annually on or before the last legislative day in January, provide an
15 update and presentation to the House Committee on Government Operations
16 and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Government Operations
17 concerning all action items in the all-hazards mitigation plan required by
18 subdivision (1) of this subsection.

19 (4) Provide assistance to municipalities to develop and implement the
20 components of the Statewide Emergency Management Plan described in
21 subdivision 41(4) of this chapter.

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Sec. 2. 20 V.S.A. § 41 is amended to read:

§ 41. STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Department of Public Safety’s Vermont Emergency Management Division, in collaboration with the Chief Recovery Officer and in consultation with regional planning commissions, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and Vermont’s long-term recovery groups, shall create, and republish as needed, but not less than every five years, a comprehensive State Emergency Management Plan. The Plan shall:

(1) detail response systems during all-hazards events, including communications, coordination among State, local, private, and volunteer entities, and the deployment of State and federal resources. ~~The Plan shall also;~~

(2) detail the State’s emergency preparedness measures and goals, including those for the prevention of, protection against, mitigation of, and recovery from all-hazards events. ~~The Plan shall;~~

(3) include templates and guidance for regional emergency management and for local emergency plans that support municipalities in their respective emergency management planning; and

(4) provide a framework for municipalities to develop and implement:

(A) emergency parking plans for areas within a municipality affected by an all-hazard event;

1 the acquired property as open space with a deed restriction or covenant
2 prohibiting development of the property.

3 Sec. 4. 32 V.S.A. § 3710 is added to read:

4 § 3710. VOLUNTARY BUYOUT REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

5 (a) There is established the Voluntary Buyout Reimbursement Program to
6 reimburse municipalities for the value of municipal property taxes associated
7 with the flood-prone properties acquired by a municipality pursuant to 20
8 V.S.A. § 51 and preserved as public open space with a deed restriction or
9 covenant prohibiting development of the property.

10 (b) On or before September 1 of each year, the Commissioner of Public
11 Safety shall certify the properties eligible for the Program to the Commissioner
12 of Taxes along with any other information required by the Commissioner of
13 Taxes. To be eligible for reimbursement under the Program, a municipality
14 must have acquired an eligible property on or after July 1, 2023 and preserved
15 the property as public open space with a deed restriction or covenant
16 prohibiting development of the property. The Commissioner of Public Safety
17 shall first certify properties to the Commissioner of Taxes pursuant to this
18 subsection on or before September 1, 2025.

19 (c) The Commissioner of Taxes shall certify the Program payment amounts
20 to the Secretary of Administration. The Secretary shall make an annual
21 payment to each municipality for each eligible property to compensate for the

1 loss of municipal property tax. The payment shall be calculated using the
2 grand list value of the acquired property for the year during which the property
3 was either damaged by flooding or identified as flood-prone by the
4 Commissioner of Public Safety, multiplied by the municipal tax rate, including
5 any submunicipal tax rates, in effect each year. This payment shall be made on
6 or before January 1 of each year for five years.

7 (d) If a municipality has received payment for any acquired property under
8 subsection (c) of this section for five consecutive years, it shall be eligible for
9 payment for ensuing five year periods in an amount equal to one-half of the
10 initial annual payment calculated under subsection (c).

11 (e) Payments made pursuant to this section shall be paid from the PILOT
12 Special Fund established under section 3709 of this subchapter. Payments
13 shall be disbursed only after all other requirements of subchapter 4 of this
14 chapter are met. If the PILOT Special Fund balance is insufficient to pay the
15 full amount of all payments authorized under this subchapter, then payments
16 calculated under this section and due to each eligible municipality for each
17 property shall be reduced proportionately.

18 Sec. 5. VOLUNTARY BUYOUT REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM;

19 TRANSFERS FROM PILOT SPECIAL FUND

20 Notwithstanding any provision of 32 V.S.A. § 3709 to the contrary, in fiscal
21 year 2026 the Commissioner of Finance and Management shall transfer from

1 the PILOT Special Fund to the Voluntary Buyout Reimbursement Program
2 \$1,000,000.00 for purposes of the administration of the Program.

3 * * * Division of Emergency Management; Assistance to Municipalities * * *

4 Sec. 6. DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT; POSITIONS;

5 APPROPRIATION

6 (a) The following positions are created in the Division of Emergency
7 Management:

8 (1) one full-time, exempt Municipal Grant Liaison; and

9 (2) one full-time, exempt All-Hazard Mitigation Technician.

10 (b) The Municipal Grant Liaison shall be dedicated to grant research, grant
11 applications support, coordination between municipal corporations and the
12 Federal Emergency Management Agency, and direct assistance to municipal
13 corporations for the acquisition of grants and other funding sources for all-
14 hazard relief and recovery efforts. The Flood Mitigation Technician shall be
15 dedicated to providing or supporting engineering analyses for all-hazard
16 mitigation projects, oversight of municipal remediation and recovery projects,
17 and managing technical assistance to municipal corporations for all-hazard
18 recovery.

1 Sec. 7. DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT; ALL-HAZARD
2 AND WEATHER ALERT SYSTEMS FOR MUNICIPAL
3 CORPORATIONS

4 Upon request of a municipal corporation, the Division of Emergency
5 Management, in collaboration with regional planning commissions and the
6 Vermont League of Cities and Towns, shall assist the municipal corporation
7 with access to and development of the following:

8 (1) surface water flood monitoring devices, which shall automatically
9 trigger notification systems for emergency services providers and residents;

10 (2) alert systems that are integrated with a statewide weather alert
11 system for real-time updates during severe weather events; and

12 (3) connection to a statewide enhanced weather alert system that:

13 (A) predicts local and regional conditions using advanced modeling;

14 and

15 (B) issues real-time warnings for flooding, blizzards, and ice storms
16 through multiple communication channels.

17 * * * Needs Assessment Report * * *

18 Sec. 8. DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT; STATE
19 STAKEHOLDERS; NEEDS ASSESSMENT; REPORT

20 The Division of Emergency Management, Chief Recovery Officer, Agency
21 of Commerce and Community Development, Agency of Natural Resources,

1 and Agency of Transportation shall conduct a needs assessment to identify any
2 additional staffing, resources, technical needs, or authority needed to carry out
3 the provisions of this act. On or before November 15, 2025, the Division shall
4 submit a written report to the House Committees on Appropriations and on
5 Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Senate Committees on
6 Appropriations and on Government Operations containing the needs
7 assessments conducted by the State agencies and departments identified in this
8 section.

9 * * * Vermont Community Radio Program * * *

10 Sec. 9. VERMONT COMMUNITY RADIO GRANT PROGRAM

11 (a) Findings. The General Assembly finds that:

12 (1) Vermont's seven active community radio stations currently serve
13 over 200,000 Vermonters, many in rural and underserved areas.

14 (2) Community radio stations have consistently provided critical
15 information during emergencies, including Tropical Storm Irene, recent severe
16 flooding, and other natural disasters.

17 (3) These stations operate with small budgets, primarily relying on
18 volunteer staff and listener donations, and are ineligible for federal funding
19 through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting due to their size.

1 (4) Upcoming FCC-approved stations in Bristol, Richmond-Underhill-
2 Jericho, and Ludlow will expand coverage to nearly all Vermont counties,
3 increasing statewide accessibility to vital community radio services.

4 (5) Investment in these stations strengthens Vermont’s public safety
5 network and promotes civic engagement by providing local, hyper-focused
6 content that commercial and statewide media cannot replicate.

7 (b) Intent. The intent of this section is to ensure Vermont’s community
8 radio stations remain resilient and prepared to serve as lifelines during
9 emergencies while fostering local engagement and preserving Vermont’s
10 unique community fabric.

11 (c) Grant program.

12 (1) The Vermont Community Radio Grant Program is established to
13 provide one-time funding to community radio stations for the purpose of:

14 (A) upgrading equipment and infrastructure necessary for reliable
15 emergency broadcasting;

16 (B) procuring and installing backup generators; and

17 (C) enhancing operational sustainability through software
18 improvements and technical training.

19 (2) The Program shall be administered by the Commissioner of Public
20 Safety or designee in collaboration with the Vermont Association of
21 Broadcasters.

1 (3) Grants shall be allocated as follows:

2 (A) up to \$25,000.00 per station for seven active community radio
3 stations; and

4 (B) up to \$10,000.00 per station for three upcoming stations currently
5 under construction.

6 (4) To be eligible for a grant under the Program, an applicant shall:

7 (A) be a nonprofit, noncommercial community radio station licensed
8 in Vermont;

9 (B) demonstrate a history of providing emergency broadcasting
10 services or show the capacity to provide those services upon funding; and

11 (C) submit a detailed implementation plan for the proposed use of
12 grant funding.

13 (d) Report. On or before June 30, 2026, a community radio station that
14 receives a grant under the Program shall provide to the Commissioner of
15 Public Safety a report detailing the:

16 (1) use of grant funds, including itemized expenses;

17 (2) improvements achieved in emergency readiness and operational
18 capacity; and

19 (3) impact on community service and engagement.

20 * * * Municipal Finances and Indebtedness * * *

21 Sec. 10. 24 V.S.A. 1585 is added to read:

1 § 1585. UNASSIGNED FUND BALANCE

2 Monies from a budget approved by the voters at an annual or special
3 meeting that are not expended by the end of a municipality’s fiscal year shall
4 be under the control and direction of the legislative body of the municipality
5 and may be carried forward from year to year as an unassigned fund balance.
6 Unassigned fund balances may be invested and reinvested as are other monies
7 received by a town treasurer and may be expended for any public purpose as
8 established by the legislative body of the municipality.

9 Sec. 11. 24 V.S.A. § 1790 is added to read:

10 § 1790. EMERGENCY BORROWING; ALL-HAZARD EVENT OR STATE
11 OF EMERGENCY

12 The legislative body of a municipality may borrow money, in the name of
13 the municipal corporation, by issuance of its notes or orders for the purpose of
14 paying expenses of the municipal corporation or for public improvements
15 associated with an all-hazards event or a declared state of emergency pursuant
16 to 20 V.S.A. chapter 1. The notes or orders shall be for a period of not more
17 than five years or a term not to exceed the reasonably anticipated useful life of
18 the improvements or assets financed by the notes or orders.

19 Sec. 12. 24 V.S.A. § 1759 is amended to read:

20 § 1759. DENOMINATIONS; PAYMENTS; INTEREST

1 (a)(1) Any bond issued under this subchapter shall draw interest at a rate
2 not to exceed the rate approved by the voters of the municipal corporation in
3 accordance with section 1758 of this title, or if no rate is specified in the vote
4 under that section, at a rate approved by the legislative ~~branch~~ body of the
5 municipal corporation, ~~such the~~ interest to be payable semiannually as
6 determined by the legislative body of the municipal corporation. ~~Such The~~
7 bonds or bond shall be payable serially, the first payment to be deferred not
8 later than from one to five years after the issuance of the bonds and subsequent
9 principal payments or debt service payments, which include both principal and
10 interest payments, to be continued annually in ~~equal~~ substantially level or
11 ~~diminishing~~ declining amounts, as determined by the legislative body of the
12 municipality, so that the entire debt will be paid in not more than 20 years from
13 the date of issue.

14 (2) In the case of bonds issued for the purchase or development of a
15 municipal forest, the first payment may be deferred not more than 30 years
16 from the date of issuance ~~thereof~~ of the bond. ~~Thereafter such~~ After any
17 deferral period, the bonds or bond shall be payable annually in ~~equal~~
18 substantially level or ~~diminishing amounts~~ declining annual debt service as the
19 legislative body of the municipal corporation may determine, so that the entire
20 debt will be paid in not more than 60 years from the date of issue.

21 * * *

1 (b) General obligation bonds authorized under this subchapter for the
2 purpose of financing the improvement, construction, acquisition, repair,
3 renovation, and replacement of a municipal plant as defined in 30 V.S.A. §
4 2901 shall be paid serially, the first payment to be deferred not later than from
5 one to five years after the issuance of the bonds, and subsequent principal
6 payments or debt service payments, which include both principal and interest
7 payments, to be continued annually in substantially level or declining amounts,
8 as determined by the legislative body of the municipal corporation, so that the
9 entire debt will be paid ~~over a term equal to the useful life of the financed~~
10 ~~improvements, but~~ not more than 40 years from the date of issue, ~~and may be~~
11 ~~so arranged that beginning with the first year in which principal is payable, the~~
12 ~~amount of principal and interest in any year shall be as nearly equal as is~~
13 ~~practicable according to the denomination in which such bonds are issued,~~
14 notwithstanding other permissible payment schedules authorized by this
15 section.

16 * * * Dam Drawdown During Emergency Flood Events * * *

17 Sec. 13. 20 V.S.A. § 9 is amended to read:

18 § 9. EMERGENCY POWERS OF GOVERNOR

19 Subject to the provisions of this chapter, in the event of an all-hazards event
20 in or directed upon the United States or Canada that causes or may cause
21 substantial damage or injury to persons or property within the State in any

1 manner, the Governor may declare a state of emergency within the entire State
2 or any portion or portions of the State. Thereafter, the Governor shall have and
3 may exercise for as long as the Governor determines the emergency to exist the
4 following additional powers within ~~such~~ the area or areas:

5 * * *

6 (12) In consultation with the Secretary of Natural Resources or
7 designee, to authorize the Agency to waive applicable permits and restrictions
8 under 10 V.S.A. chapter 47 or the Vermont Water Quality Standards to allow
9 dams within the State to draw down water levels in anticipation of a flood
10 event that is likely to cause substantial damage or injury to persons or property.
11 Waivers may only be issued if the Governor, in consultation with the Secretary
12 of Natural Resources or designee, has significant reason to believe doing so
13 will decrease the risk of substantial damage to persons or property within the
14 State. Dam operators operating under a waiver shall be required to make every
15 effort to minimize the environmental impact of a water level drawdown under
16 the authorized waiver.

17 * * * Appropriations * * *

18 Sec. 14. APPROPRIATIONS

19 (a) In fiscal year 2026, the following sums are appropriated from the
20 General Fund to the Department of Public Safety:

21 (1) \$275,000.00 to support the two positions created in Sec. 6 of this act;

1 (2) \$950,000.00 to support the Urban Search and Rescue Team created
2 pursuant to 20 V.S.A. § 50; and

3 (3) \$205,000.00 for the purpose of funding the Vermont Community
4 Radio Grant Program.

5 (b) In fiscal year 2026, the sum of \$275,000.00 is appropriated from the
6 General Fund to the Agency of Natural Resources for purposes of procuring a
7 fire apparatus.

8 (c) Any unexpended monies from the appropriation under subdivision
9 (a)(3) of this section shall revert to the General Fund on or before July 1, 2026.

10 * * * Effective Date * * *

11 Sec. 15. EFFECTIVE DATE

12 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

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14

15 (Committee vote: _____)

16

17

Representative _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE