

1 Introduced by Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

2 Date:

3 Subject: Internal security and public safety; emergency management;  
4 miscellaneous amendments

5 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish the  
6 Ready Response Grant Program and authorize the Division of Emergency  
7 Management to administer the Program for purposes of sourcing, storing, and  
8 distributing shelf-stable foods and bottled water during emergencies. This bill  
9 also proposes to establish the Technical Rescue Grant Program to assist rescue  
10 agencies with the improvement of operational readiness and investment in  
11 specialized equipment. This bill also proposes to establish criminal penalties  
12 for threatening and obstructing first responders during a public safety  
13 emergency. This bill also proposes to amend various statutes to require  
14 disability inclusion in all levels of emergency response planning for the State,  
15 municipal corporations, and educational corporations. This bill also proposes  
16 to require the fire chief of a municipal fire department to serve as the town  
17 forest fire warden for the municipality or municipalities served by the  
18 department. This bill also proposes to extend funding for the Department of  
19 Public Safety to procure and install equipment for the purpose of building out a  
20 computer-aided dispatch system for public safety communications. This bill  
21 also proposes to appropriate monies to support the creation of State emergency

1 and all-hazards response and preparedness materials in multiple languages,  
2 support the operation of the Urban Search and Rescue Team, award grants  
3 from the Technical Rescue Microgrant Program, and support current  
4 operations and programming of the Vermont Access Network.

5 An act relating to emergency management

6 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

7 \* \* \* Ready Response Grant Program \* \* \*

8 Sec. 1. 20 V.S.A. § 52 is added to read:

9 § 52. READY RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAM

10 (a) As used in this section, “ready response” means the provision of short-  
11 term food and bottled water resources, including logistical support and  
12 transportation, to individuals in Vermont who do not have adequate access to  
13 food and water at agreed upon times when the Division of Emergency  
14 Management seeks resources assistance from a grantee or responds to an all-  
15 hazard event or state of emergency.

16 (b) There is created the Ready Response Grant Program to be managed and  
17 administered by the Division of Emergency Management. The Division shall  
18 award an annual grant to an eligible food bank to source, store, and distribute  
19 shelf-stable, ready-to-eat foods and bottled water at times and in types and  
20 quantities per a written memorandum of agreement with the Division.



1        (a) Creation of Program. There is created the Technical Rescue Grant  
2        Program to assist Vermont fire departments, emergency medical services  
3        agencies, and technical rescue agencies with the improvement of operational  
4        readiness and investment in specialized equipment, personal protective gear,  
5        and training. The Program shall be administered by the Department of Public  
6        Safety.

7        (b) Working Group. The Technical Rescue Grant Working Group is  
8        established to review applications and recommend awards to the  
9        Commissioner of Public Safety. The Working Group shall be composed of the  
10       following members:

11        (1) the Manager of the Vermont Urban Search and Rescue Team, who  
12        shall be Chair;

13        (2) one member of the Senate Committee on Government Operations,  
14        appointed by the Committee on Committees;

15        (3) one member of the House Committee on Government Operations  
16        and Military Affairs, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

17        (4) a representative of a fire department, appointed by the Commissioner  
18        of Public Safety; and

19        (5) a representative of an emergency medical services agency, appointed  
20        by the Commissioner of Health.

21        (c) Compensation and reimbursement.

1           (1) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General  
2           Assembly, a legislative member of the Working Group shall be entitled to per  
3           diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23.  
4           These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the General  
5           Assembly.

6           (2) Other members of the Working Group whose participation is not  
7           supported through their employment or association shall receive per diem  
8           compensation pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1010 and reimbursement of travel  
9           expenses. A per diem authorized by this subsection shall be paid from the  
10          budget of the Department of Public Safety.

11          (d) Eligibility. Fire departments, emergency medical service agencies, and  
12          technical rescue agencies operating within Vermont shall be eligible for  
13          Program grants. Grant applicants shall demonstrate their use, planned use, or  
14          need for technical rescue operations within their service area. All grant  
15          applicants shall submit their application on a form adopted by the Department.

16          The Department shall prioritize grant awards for applicants that:

17               (1) maintain a memorandum of understanding with Vermont Emergency  
18               Management for swiftwater rescue; or

19               (2) function as regional technical rescue teams providing services in  
20               multiple jurisdictions.

1       (e) Grant award limitations. The maximum award to any applicant in a  
2       given fiscal year shall be not more than \$5,000.00. The Program shall not  
3       award more than \$25,000.00 in total grants in a given fiscal year.

4       (f) Application review and scoring. The Department shall adopt  
5       procedures governing application submission, forms, review, scoring, and  
6       recommendation of awards. The procedures for application scoring shall  
7       include alignment with the Program priorities in subsection (b) of this section,  
8       operational need, geographic service area, feasibility of the proposed project,  
9       cost-effectiveness, and sustainability of the applicant’s services.

10       (g) Grant recipient reporting; Department report. Each grant recipient shall  
11       submit to the Department a final expenditure report, proof of purchase or  
12       training completion, and a narrative description of how the grant improved the  
13       recipient’s technical rescue capacity. Annually on or before November 15, the  
14       Department shall submit a written report to the House Committee on  
15       Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on  
16       Government Operations summarizing grant awards, outcomes, and Program  
17       recommendations.

18       (h) Rulemaking. The Department may adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A.  
19       chapter 25 as needed to implement this section.

20       \* \* \* Threatening and Obstructing First Responders; Criminal Penalty \* \* \*

1 Sec. 3. 13 V.S.A. § 3020 is added to read:

2 § 3020. THREATENING FIRST RESPONDERS DURING PUBLIC  
3 SAFETY EMERGENCIES

4 (a) As used in this section:

5 (1) “First responder” includes any law enforcement officer certified by  
6 the Vermont Criminal Justice Council pursuant to 20 V.S.A. § 2358, firefighter  
7 as defined in 20 V.S.A. § 3151(3), and emergency medical personnel as  
8 defined in 24 V.S.A. § 2651.

9 (2) “Public safety emergency” means an emergency event in which a  
10 first responder must engage in the lawful performance of a legal duty to  
11 address an immediate threat to public health or safety.

12 (b) It is unlawful for an individual to intentionally engage in any of the  
13 following conduct within 25 feet of a first responder during a public safety  
14 emergency, provided that the first responder announces that they are a first  
15 responder and warns the individual not to approach:

16 (1) obstruct or impede the first responder’s ability to perform the first  
17 responder’s duties; or

18 (2) threaten the first responder with physical harm.

19 (c) A person who is convicted of a violation of this section shall be  
20 imprisoned not more than 60 days or fined not more than \$500.00, or both.

21 \* \* \* Disability Inclusion in Emergency Planning \* \* \*

1 Sec. 4. 20 V.S.A. § 3a is amended to read:

2 § 3a. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION; DUTIES; BUDGET

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

5 \* \* \*

6 (2) Assist the State Emergency Response Commission, the local  
7 emergency planning committees, the regional emergency management  
8 committees, and the municipally established local organizations referred to in  
9 section 6 of this title ~~in~~ with:

10 (A) carrying out their designated emergency functions, including  
11 developing, implementing, and coordinating emergency plans;

12 (B) designation of Access and Functional Needs Coordinators;

13 (C) completion of disability-led training programs and inclusive  
14 training exercises; and

15 (D) proper execution of after-action reviews to address accessibility  
16 gaps.

17 \* \* \*

18 (d) In coordination with the Division of Fire Safety, the Division shall  
19 inspect all emergency shelter spaces for compliance with the Americans with  
20 Disabilities Act.

1 Sec. 5. 20 V.S.A. § 6 is amended to read:

2 § 6. LOCAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR EMERGENCY  
3 MANAGEMENT

4 \* \* \*

5 (c)(1) Each local organization shall develop and maintain an all-hazards  
6 emergency management plan in accordance with the State Emergency  
7 Management Plan and guidance set forth by the Division of Emergency  
8 Management. An all-hazards emergency management plan adopted pursuant  
9 to this subsection shall utilize an access and functional needs framework.  
10 Local organizations shall ensure that the plan applies the “Communication,  
11 Medical needs, Independence, Supervision, and Transportation” framework to  
12 identify needs, provide accommodations, and operationalize support.

13 (2) The Division shall amend the local emergency plan template and any  
14 best management practices or guidance the Division issues to municipalities to  
15 address the need for the siting of local and regional emergency shelters in a  
16 manner that allows access by those in need during an all-hazards event,  
17 including access by individuals with diverse functional needs. The Division  
18 shall evaluate universal access standards as a component of the plan, practices,  
19 and guidance concerning the siting of local and regional emergency shelters.

20 (3) The Division shall advise municipalities that when a shelter is sited  
21 under a local emergency plan, the municipality should work with the Agency

1 of Human Services, the American Red Cross, disability-led organizations, and  
2 community-based emergency or charitable food providers, to assess the facility  
3 and the facility’s potential operations, including the characteristics of the  
4 surrounding area during an all-hazards event, multiple routes of travel and  
5 possible hazards that could prevent access to the shelter, and the need for  
6 immediate and sustained access to food and water for individuals using the  
7 shelter.

8 (4) The Division, in coordination with the Agency of Human Services  
9 and disability-led organizations, shall advise municipalities, upon completion  
10 of a local emergency management plan, on how to conduct training and  
11 exercises pertaining to sheltering.

12 (d) Regional emergency management committees shall be established by  
13 the Division of Emergency Management.

14 \* \* \*

15 (3) A regional emergency management committee shall consist of  
16 voting and nonvoting members.

17 \* \* \*

18 (B) Nonvoting members. Nonvoting members shall include  
19 individuals with lived disability experience and individuals representing  
20 organizations that serve vulnerable populations. Nonvoting members may  
21 include representatives from the following organizations serving within the

1 region: fire departments, emergency medical services, law enforcement, other  
2 entities providing emergency response personnel, media, transportation,  
3 regional planning commissions, hospitals, the Department of Health’s district  
4 office, the Division of Emergency Management, ~~organizations serving~~  
5 ~~vulnerable populations~~, local libraries, arts and culture organizations, regional  
6 development corporations, local business organizations, community-based  
7 emergency or charitable food providers, and any other interested public or  
8 private individual or organization.

9 \* \* \*

10 (5) Committees shall develop and maintain a regional plan, consistent  
11 with guidance provided by the Division of Emergency Management in  
12 coordination with regional planning commissions, that describes regional  
13 coordination and regionally available resources. A regional plan adopted  
14 pursuant to this subdivision shall utilize an access and functional needs  
15 framework. Committees shall ensure that the plan applies the  
16 “Communication, Medical needs, Independence, Supervision, and  
17 Transportation” framework to identify needs, provide accommodations, and  
18 operationalize support.

19 Sec. 6. 20 V.S.A. § 32 is amended to read:

20 § 32. LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEES; CREATION;  
21 DUTIES

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\* \* \*

(b) All local emergency planning committees shall include representatives from the following: fire departments; local and regional emergency medical services; local, county, and State law enforcement; other entities providing first responders or emergency management personnel; organizations serving vulnerable populations; media; transportation; regional planning commissions; hospitals; industry; the Vermont National Guard; the Department of Health’s district office; and an animal rescue organization, and may include any other interested public or private individual or organization. Where the local emergency planning committee represents more than one region of the State, the Commission shall appoint representatives that are geographically diverse.

(c) A local emergency planning committee shall perform all the following duties:

(1) Carry out all the requirements of a committee pursuant to EPCRA, including preparing a local emergency planning committee plan. The plan shall be coordinated with the State emergency management plan and may be expanded to address all-hazards identified in the State emergency management plan. A local emergency planning committee shall coordinate with disability-led organizations throughout all phases of emergency management planning.

At a minimum, the local emergency planning committee plan shall include the following:

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Sec. 7. 20 V.S.A. § 51 is amended to read:

§ 51. DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT; ALL-HAZARD  
AND WEATHER ALERT SYSTEMS FOR MUNICIPAL  
CORPORATIONS

(a) Upon request of a municipal corporation, the Division of Emergency Management shall assist the municipal corporation with access to the following:

(1) a statewide river observation and modeling system that details current river level observations and models river flood outlooks; and

(2) a statewide enhanced weather forecasting and alert system that:

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

and

(B) issues real-time warnings for potentially dangerous weather through multiple communication channels.

(b) Any all-hazard or weather alert systems used by a municipal corporation pursuant to subdivision (a)(2)(B) of this section shall include communication systems that are accessible by individuals with disabilities.

Sec. 8. 20 V.S.A. § 54 is added to read:

§ 54. PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN DISABILITY REGISTRIES





1 install equipment for the purpose of building out a computer-aided dispatch  
2 system for public safety communications.

3 (b) Notwithstanding any provisions of 2023 Acts and Resolves No. 78, Sec.  
4 C.114 to the contrary, the Public Safety Communications Task Force shall  
5 continue in existence until February 15, 2027. The Task Force shall meet as  
6 necessary to advise the Department of Public Safety on executing the Task  
7 Force recommendations and final design plan. Notwithstanding 2023 Acts and  
8 Resolves No. 78, Sec. C.114(d)(3), members of the Task Force shall be entitled  
9 to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses permitted under 32  
10 V.S.A. § 1010. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to  
11 the Department of Public Safety.

12 \* \* \* Appropriations \* \* \*

13 Sec. 12. APPROPRIATIONS

14 The following sums are appropriated from the General Fund in fiscal year  
15 2027:

16 (1) \$70,163.00 to the Agency of Administration for purposes of  
17 supporting the creation of State emergency and all-hazards response and  
18 preparedness materials in 15 languages, including English and American Sign  
19 Language, through the Vermont Language Justice Project;

20 (2) \$720,000.00 to the Department of Public Safety for purposes of  
21 supporting the Urban Search and Rescue Team;

