TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

The Committee on Natural Resources and Energy to which was referred Senate Bill No. 219 entitled "An act relating to an energy navigator program report" respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

Sec. 1. ENERGY NAVIGATOR PROGRAM; REPORT

(a) The Department of Public Service shall contract with a third-party consultant to design a Vermont community-based home energy navigator and coaching program, in collaboration with the Climate Action Center of Addison County and other existing community-based energy navigator programs in Vermont, that will provide in-person and remote energy coaching services to residential consumers in communities statewide. The Department's consultant shall build on findings from the Department's comprehensive process and performance evaluation of more than 100 publicly funded energy programs focused on affordability, including electric and thermal efficiency, weatherization for customers with low income, and beneficial electrification initiatives to inform the design of a Vermont community-based home energy navigator and coaching program. The Department's consultant shall consult with Efficiency Vermont, the Vermont State Energy Office, the Vermont Climate Action Office, Vermont's community action agencies, the Vermont

Energy and Climate Action Network, Vermont's electric utilities, community-based home energy navigator and coaching programs, and other states, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, that have experience with community-based energy programs. For the purposes of this section, "residential consumers" includes homeowners, landlords, and renters.

(b) The program shall:

(1) provide guidance to residential consumers, particularly those with low and moderate incomes, to better understand and navigate energy efficiency and clean energy investment options to affordably meet their home energy needs;

(2) advise residential consumers on accessing available grants, rebates, financing, and other assistance programs and incentives to meet their home energy needs;

(3) assist residential consumers in prioritizing identified energy-saving opportunities, including through the integration of weatherization strategies to reduce heating and cooling loads that could minimize the need for the installation of new equipment and lower future electric demands on the grid;

(4) help residential consumers connect to local contractors and review and analyze contractor recommendations regarding cost, payment, and other relevant factors;

(5) advise residential consumers in person, as necessary, and over time, recognizing that hands-on coaching help may be needed at a consumer's home and over several years;

(6) provide ongoing State funding to support the operations of community-based energy coaching programs; and

(7) use available grant funds and private partnerships to support program implementation.

(c) On or before March 1, 2027, the Department shall submit a report on the program design to the House Committee on Energy and Digital Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy. The report shall include a description of the design of the program, which could include the creation of a pilot program or expansion and support of existing community-based programs, a description of the technical assistance and educational materials to be developed as part of the program, an estimate of program costs, funding sources to provide ongoing support to community-based energy coaching programs, a target number of residential consumers to be served by the program, energy and emissions savings that will result from the program, and a proposed timeline for the implementation of the program.

Sec. 2. APPROPRIATIONS

(a) In fiscal year 2027, the sum of $25,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Public Service to hire the third-party consultant for the energy navigator report.

(b) In fiscal year 2027, the sum of $10,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Climate Economy Action Center to collaborate with the Department of Public Service on the energy navigator program design.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

(Committee vote: _____)

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Senator _____

FOR THE COMMITTEE