

April 21, 2025

RE: Post-disaster Individual and Family Recovery Policy

Dear Senate Committee on Government Operations Chair Collamore:

Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) are writing to ask that the legislature consider what the state's post-disaster individual and family recovery policy could and should be, and that perhaps H.397 could task a working group to develop a proposal or alternatives.

Our principal role before, during, and after disaster is to support municipalities, and to serve as local liaisons to the State Emergency Operations Center. We do so through our Emergency Planning Grant and a memorandum of understanding with Vermont Emergency Management. Individual and family needs recovery is within the purview of the Agency of Human Services (AHS) and coordinating that task falls to one staff person within that agency, though it's our understanding that additional staff may be added.

Even though RPCs do not have a defined role in engaging with AHS and the volunteer-driven long-term recovery groups that have been stood up in the wake of recent disasters, we do work with them and have visibility into the challenges. It is our observation that the absence of a state disaster recovery policy and protocol for individuals and families leads to lack of preparation and confusion at the community and household levels when disaster strikes, and it is for this reason we're writing.

When disaster displaces Vermonters from their homes temporarily or permanently, or compromises the livability of their house or apartment, there are no clear policies or protocols they can reference to know what, if any, assistance they should expect from federal, state, and local government, service organizations, and philanthropic groups. The current approach relies upon the ability of local communities and volunteers to organize, fundraise, and assist those in need. This creates a patchwork quilt of capacity, equity, and justice. **Vermont needs to develop disaster recovery policy that defines expectations from the hours and days after the disaster strikes to long-term individual and family needs recovery.**

Creating a disaster recovery policy will guide both disaster response and, importantly, preparation. Recovery preparation from the individual and household level to the highest levels of government relies upon understanding post-disaster expectations. Critically, whatever policy is developed must not assume that FEMA and other federal resources will be available to Vermonters as many of our disasters will not meet federal aid thresholds, or if the federal program rules will mesh with Vermonter needs. There is also uncertainty as to the future roles of FEMA in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Vermonters should know if it is state policy to rely upon community-by-community capacity to act, the establishment of a disaster recovery framework stood up at times of disaster that coordinates actions among agencies, governments, service organizations, and philanthropic entities to assess and respond

to individual and family long-term recovery needs, or something in between.

While the recent string of major disasters has increased awareness of the challenge, it is not a new concern. State agencies and partners, including the regional planning commissions, have been grappling with the development of an approach since Irene. An Individual and Family Needs Recovery Plan was drafted in 2019, but its further development was interrupted by the pandemic and, unfortunately, the need to focus on response to the recent string of major disasters.

Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact VAPDA Emergency Management Committee Chair Chris Company or VAPDA Chair Devon Neary.

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Best regards,



Charlie Baker, Chair
VAPDA Government Relations Committee

Cc: committee assistant