

Compiled feedback on Flood Omnibus Bill H.397 for Senate Government Operations

To the members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations,

The Just Recovery Coalition, which was formed in Summer 2024 around the People's Demands for a Just Recovery from Flooding, is writing with concern about the Flood Omnibus Bill.

Coalition members have been tracking this bill since its introduction by Representative Wasazak. Early versions of the bill emphasized the importance of community-led and people-centered disaster response. As representatives from Long Term Recovery Groups, recovery commissions, municipal advisory groups and response teams, it is clear that the current version of the bill fails to represent community needs and specifically address ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations during a flood emergency. The version of this bill shared on April 30, 2025 is notably less specific than earlier iterations, and neglects crucial issues cast in sharp relief by the last two years' of flooding. Most notably:

1. There is no acknowledgement of Long Term Recovery Groups and other community-based organizations. These entities fill a vital gap in response and recovery plans through their service of thousands of individuals impacted by flooding, and complement services provided by Vermont Emergency Management. There is no mention of the need for individual assistance after disaster in this bill. We recommend an appropriation to fund Long Term Recovery Groups, so they can continue providing this essential component of disaster response services.
2. There is no mechanism to involve municipalities or stakeholders in regular updates and implementation of Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs). Creating such a mechanism would significantly improve disaster response and recovery efforts, "to ensure that vulnerable populations, including aging populations and individuals with disabilities, within the municipality are contacted and visited to ensure their safety and wellness during a flood emergency" ([H.397 Section 2.4.B 4/30 draft](#)):
3. There is no new funding generated or allocated to flood response and recovery. Taxation of Vermont's wealthiest 1% of earners and second homes could generate needed tax revenue to fund disaster preparedness and response, as well as construction of affordable, flood-safe housing.
4. Stakeholder involvement in vulnerability assessment and disaster planning is not mentioned. We urge you to create a working group dedicated to assessing vulnerabilities and include the following stakeholders that closer fits the [H.397 Section 8 language from 4/30 draft as passed from the house](#):
 - a. Municipalities and Regional Planning Commissions
 - b. Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs) and Vermont Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)
 - c. Commissions on Recovery and Resilience
 - d. Community groups with experience in disaster response, as outlined in the [FEMA definition of Whole Communities](#)

- e. State Agencies and actors: Division of Emergency Management, Chief Recovery Officer, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Agency of Natural Resources, and Agency of Transportation

For further context please refer to the [People's Demands for Just Recovery](#) from July 2024 and the [Long-term Recovery Groups Demands](#) shared this legislative session.

Regards,
Just Recovery Coalition