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**DATE:** March 15, 2026

**TO:** Senator Brian Collamore, Chair, Senate Committee on Government Operations

**FROM:** Eric Forand, Director, Division of Emergency Management, Dept. of Public Safety

**SUBJECT:** H.935 -Internal security and public safety; emergency management; miscellaneous amendments

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Chair Collamore- Please accept this memorandum as written testimony to the referenced bill currently in your committee.

**Page 2: Sec. 1. 20 V.S.A. § 52 is added to read: § 52. READY RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAM**

- As we all know, I am not here to directly advocate for funding that is not in the Governor's budget.

However, I would like to take a couple of minutes to discuss a gap that I see in the state's ability to respond quickly to disasters. Following disasters like the '23 and '24 flooding events, the State does not have immediately accessible food and water stores that it could provide to survivors to allow them the ability to stay in their homes. The State also does not have the means to quickly and efficiently transport and distribute food and water to survivors using pre-existing locations and vehicles.

Having access to a ready-to-deploy supply of water and food at a regional level would be beneficial to Vermonters. Utilizing an existing network of food distribution locations would be efficient. Using pre-existing delivery trucks and routes would be economical.

Supporting Vermonters immediately after a disaster is important as state and federal resources are going to be 24-36 hours out because the state does not have a cache of supplies, and the federal government's supplies are in Massachusetts or Maryland.

Any support at the local level allows the emergency to potentially be solved at the local level in the quickest, most economical, and most efficient manner.

**Page 3: Sec. 2. 20 V.S.A. § 53 is added to read: § 53. TECHNICAL RESCUE GRANT PROGRAM**

- Vermont Emergency Management, in coordination with the Division of Fire Safety have a program in place already to support participating agencies through the issuance of Memorandum of Understandings. The current model has the USAR program manager working with interested
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municipalities to initiate a local USAR team. This coordination assures that municipalities have the desire, resources, and backing to support a team long term. This model also ensures consistency of training and equipment across teams, allowing local teams to integrate seamlessly into the state response apparatus. This current program has 10 MOU teams across the state.

**VEM recommends this language be changed to have the State USAR program manager receive this funding and run the grant directly through the existing USAR program to supplement the work already being done to create a statewide USAR response capability.**

**Page 7-8: Sec. 4. 20 V.S.A. § 6 is amended to read: §6. LOCAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

- (Sec 3 page 7 line 12) Disability led organizations are not defined in this bill. How would the town choose one, how many have to be included for them to adhere to this requirement? Municipalities use the whole community approach when drafting plans. This approach has all entities that may be involved in a response be involved in the planning, including those with disabilities. This section has begun to list specific entities and the result of that will be that other entities are left out.

**VEM recommends:**

...municipality should work with the ~~Whole Community Agency of Human Services, the American Red Cross, disability led organizations, and community based emergency or charitable food providers,~~ to assess the facility and the facility's potential operations...

- (Sec. 4 page 8 line 1) Disability led organizations are not defined in this bill. How would the town choose one, how many have to be included for them to adhere to this requirement? Municipalities use the whole community approach when training and exercising. This approach has all entities that may be involved in a response be involved in the training and exercise, including those with disabilities. This section has begun to list specific entities and the result of that will be that other entities are left out.

**VEM recommends:**

The Division, in coordination with the ~~Whole Community Agency of Human Services and disability led organizations,~~ shall advise municipalities, upon completion of a local emergency management plan...

*FEMA Definition of Whole Community –*

*Whole Community Defined As a concept, Whole Community is a means by which residents, emergency management practitioners, organizational and community leaders, and government officials can collectively understand and assess the needs of their respective communities and determine the best ways to organize and strengthen their assets, capacities, and interests. By doing so, a more effective path to societal security and resilience is built. In a sense, Whole Community is a philosophical approach on how to think about conducting emergency management.*

- (Sec. 4 page 8 line 10 & 17-19) Regional Emergency Management Committees (REMC) are platforms for Local Emergency Management Directors and local first responders to meet and exchange ideas about how they can support each other during disasters. They make up the voting membership of the Committee. Other response entities listed in sub paragraph B, which specifically calls out “organizations serving vulnerable populations”, are non-voting members. Currently REMC are having difficulty making quorums at their meetings, adding another voting member from a sub-group of volunteers who may not be able to make it, would make it even more difficult to

obtain quorum. Adding organizations serving vulnerable populations as a voting member also puts the onus on them to attend all of the meetings when they may not have the resources to do so.

**VEM recommends that the current language in the statute remain and no additional voting members are added.**

**Page 10: 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**

- This bill does not define “accessible by individuals with disabilities”. The VT Alert system can currently send messages via phone call (audio), via text & email (visual).

**VEM recommends this section be removed as it is too vague.**

**Page 13: Sec. 8. EMERGENCY AND ALL HAZARDS MEDIA; LANGUAGE ACCESS**

- VEM is currently working with the office of Racial Equity to fund the creation of disaster preparedness videos in various languages. VEM is also encouraging VLJP to apply to be included on the State contract list so it will be easier to use them in the future.

**VEM recommends this section be removed as it is duplicative of the actions that are already being taken by VEM, VLJP and Office of Racial Equity.**

I also wanted to address that funding for the current USAR program has been removed by house appropriations. As I mentioned I am not advocating for funding that is not in the Governor’s budget, but I would like to take this opportunity to speak about the great work that team has done. The State has built this team over the last decade using mostly federal grants, they are still using these grants to sustain their response capabilities and as we all know federal funding has become less certain during this administration. The team during '23, '24 and '25 saved 250 Vermonters, these were individuals that if not for these teams had a very high probability of not surviving. This team is essential to VEM and Vermonters to ensure we are prepared to respond to the next disaster.

In-closing: Thank you in advance for your consideration, if you need additional information please contact me directly.

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