

Week 23 - June 19, 2020

# THE VERMONT **STATEHOUSE INSIDER**

Weekly politics & analysis  
of the issues in Montpelier



Please visit [our website](#) for our in-depth reporting on COVID-19 throughout the United States. This site is courtesy of [Leonine FOCUS](#), our 50-state legislative/regulatory, tracking and reporting service. The site is frequently updated and includes information on executive orders, legislation, regulation, tax deadlines and more from across the country.

## **JUNETEENTH**

On Friday June 19, Governor Scott issued a proclamation declaring it 'Juneteenth Day' in Vermont. He began his press conference by speaking in stark terms about the historical significance of the date. Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865 when the last enslaved Americans were released. He addressed implicit bias and

systemic racism and expressed that “Black history is American history” and that our “present day prosperity came at an ugly price.” He also noted how much work Vermonters and Americans have to do to combat racism and said that Juneteenth deserves to be celebrated as any holiday recognizing freedom is celebrated.

His remarks were followed by Xusana Davis, Vermont's Executive Director of Racial Equity who mentioned that she herself didn't know the history of Juneteenth until about five years ago. She said: "I've heard it said that white privilege is the fact that your history is the core curriculum, and mine is an elective." She spoke of the work that needs to be done now, and said that being neutral and doing nothing is no longer an option. Her remarks were then followed by one of Vermont's few Black legislators, Representative “Coach” Christie (D-Hartford) who said Juneteenth is experienced with the mixed emotions of celebration and sadness, as we cannot ignore where we are as a society today in terms of systemic racism. He said that there is more than one Independence Day in our nation's history.

Meanwhile, the Vermont House passed a resolution commemorating the 155th anniversary of Juneteenth. [HR21](#) also recognizes the continued struggle for racial equality in Vermont and across the United States. While the resolution passed with overwhelming support it was not unanimous. The vote was [128-17](#).

Friday's Juneteenth commemorations marked the end of a week where the legislature spent many hours trying to finish up the budget bill for the first three months of FY21 and finish the process of allocating Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) dollars. The legislature is trying to wrap up this portion of the unprecedented 2020 session before a brief recess in the month of July and first two weeks of August. They plan to return the week of August 17 to finish the FY21 budget and continue to address COVID-19 recovery.

On Friday the Scott Administration also announced further loosening of restrictions for restaurants, venues and other hospitality businesses beginning on June 26. The new increased capacity for indoor establishments will be 75 people and 150 people for outdoor establishments, or 50 percent of their total capacity, whichever is less. Fourth of July festivities including fireworks can proceed as drive-in events.

---

## **HEALTH CARE CRF**

The House approved H.965 this week, a \$300 million CRF package to support the state's health and human services systems. \$250 million would go to the Provider Stabilization Grant Program which is designed to help health care providers throughout the state recover from the extreme impact that COVID-19 has had on revenues. H.965 as passed the House also allocates \$50 million to community health and social programs. Initially the House was developing a smaller program, with hopes that federal rules would change by August to allow CRF money to be used to fill budget gaps. But by early this week House leaders and the House Appropriations Committee moved forward with the larger CRF relief bill. H.965 is now in the Senate, which is still considering putting aside CRF money for use later in the summer. As a result, the Senate Health and Welfare Committee is considering amending H.965 to allocate \$216 million instead of \$300 million to health system recovery at this time.

---

## **BUSINESS AND BROADBAND CRF**

Last week the legislature gave final approval to S.350, which authorizes the distribution of Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to aid businesses impacted by COVID-19 and subsequent economic shut down. It includes \$70 million in grants for businesses that have experienced a 75 percent loss in any month between March 1, 2020 and September 1, 2020 as compared to the same period in 2019. Work began this week on a second round of funding, though details continue to shift, currently pointing to \$70 million in grants for businesses that experienced a 50 percent revenue loss as well as additional smaller funding allocations. Legislative leadership has committed to passing the second round of funding prior to their upcoming adjournment on June 26.

On Friday the Vermont House of Representatives gave final approval to H.966 which authorizes the release of additional CRF money. H.966 includes \$43 million

for broadband, connectivity, and cybersecurity initiatives and an additional \$52 million for housing initiatives.

---

## MAJOR MONEY BILLS

Key money bills continued to move this week in the push toward the summer recess.

- The Senate passed H.961, which provides funding for state government for the first quarter of the fiscal year beginning on July 1. The Senate adopted an amendment that Senate Pro Tem Tim Ashe (D/P-Chittenden) offered that mandates that the Commissioners of the Departments of Public Safety and Mental Health submit a plan to the Legislature in August for embedding mental health clinicians in every Vermont State Police barrack. The Public Safety Commissioner is charged with recommending to the Legislature a funding mechanism for the program. The Senate also adopted an amendment to a House-passed higher education study to narrow the study committee's focus to the Vermont State Colleges and reduce the number of members from 22 to 15. Highlights of the Senate-passed bill can be found [here](#).
- Late on Friday the Senate Finance Committee advanced [H.954](#), the miscellaneous tax bill, by a vote of 6-1. The committee removed Sec. 8 of the House-passed bill that proposes to reduce the amount of the safe harbor for sales taxes, among other things. Here is [draft 1.3](#) that the Senate Finance Committee approved.

---

## TRANSPORTATION BILL

On Friday, the Senate Transportation Committee advanced H.942, the Transportation Bill, which contains the state's transportation budget for the

upcoming fiscal year for road and other transportation projects. **The committee added to the bill the study of direct-to-consumer sales of motor vehicles to Vermonters by entities such as Tesla and Carvana that was originally a part of S.241.** As reported last week, the House made changes to the various vehicle incentive programs, and the Senate Transportation Committee made additional changes to those programs. The committee postponed a few projects to generate revenue to put towards projects that will reduce greenhouse gases. Here is a [link](#) to the Senate Transportation Committee amendment. The House and Senate want to agree on this bill without a conference committee so any revisions that VADA wants to the bill needs to be identified by Monday at the latest.

---

### MISCELLANEOUS MOTOR VEHICLES BILL

The House passed S.339, the so-called “miscellaneous DMV bill,” this week. The bill contains changes to Vermont’s motor vehicle statutes and includes a few “must pass” items from the DMV. It also contains the extensions of three sunsets in Title 23 as reported last week. Here is a [link](#) to the Senate-passed version of the bill.

Here is a [link](#) to the House proposal of amendment.