



Week 19 - May 22, 2020

THE VERMONT **STATEHOUSE INSIDER**

Weekly politics & analysis
of the issues in Montpelier



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FLYBY

Week 19 of the 2020 legislative session was punctuated by a major relief proposal for businesses and communities. The proposal, which was offered on Wednesday by Governor Phil Scott and members of his administration, would provide \$400

million in business, non-profit, housing and community assistance in Vermont. The governor's [proposal](#) is separated into two phases. Phase 1 would include the majority of the stimulus - \$310 million – and be divided into four categories of assistance: financial, technical, housing and marketing. Phase 2 would be roughly \$90 million and has yet to be clearly defined.

Financial assistance would include \$150 million for emergency grants for fixed cost expenses like rent, mortgage and utility expenses. These grants would be geared toward the hospitality, retail and agricultural industries and would be administered by the Department of Taxes and Agency of Agriculture. Another \$80 million would go toward grants and low-interest loans for other business sectors and non-profits. This would be administered by the Vermont Economic Development Authority. \$20 million would provide loans and grants to small businesses and small nonprofits. These would be administered through the state's nonprofit lenders.

Housing assistance would focus on stabilizing the rental housing industry and preventing homelessness. \$42 million would go to cover up to three months of rental assistance for tenants and coverage for landlords who have not received payments. \$8 million would provide grants and forgivable loans to make up to 250 units available to re-house homeless families. There would be an RFP process to select housing services providers to administer these programs.

Technical assistance would be made available to help businesses and nonprofits with recovery. This would include \$4.75 million to cover legal, CPA, information technology and other services. There would be an RFP to create a network of professionals. The program would also administer \$250,000 through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for access to counseling and mental health services for employees of small businesses and their family members.

The proposal includes \$5 million for a marketing campaign designed to encourage Vermonters to support the local economy. \$1.25 million would go toward a promotional campaign developed by the Department of Tourism and Marketing. Another \$3.75 million would go toward regional marketing organizations like chambers of commerce. This would be administered by the Department of Tourism

and Marketing.

Phase 2 of the proposal would use \$90 million to fund additional business loans, housing assistance, community recovery, broadband deployment and retraining of unemployed workers.

Overall the legislature's response to the proposal was positive. In the coming weeks lawmakers will work through their own version and likely make some substitutive changes. Legislative leadership has expressed a desire to see hazard pay funding for frontline workers and possibly more funding for housing. But boosting the economy is a top priority for everyone right now and it is expected the administration and legislature will be able to hammer out a compromise proposal in the coming weeks.

The economic relief proposal comes during a week that has seen the most forward-facing opening of the economy since the COVID-19 crisis hit. Retail establishments have opened their doors although at limited capacity and as of Friday, restaurants are allowed to open outdoor service. Places of worship will be able to open at 25 percent capacity this weekend weekend prayer services.

The Department of Health says the state is conducting nearly 1,000 tests per day and contact tracing has been scaled up. The department also announced new areas of the health care sector that can open up including inpatient and expanded outpatient procedures and dentist offices, all with strict guidance and procedures. The administration hopes to be able to announce the timetable for reopening gyms, spas and similar establishments next Friday.

While administrative action dominated the news this week the legislature was very active with bills that had been priorities before the COVID-19 crisis. With legislation addressing the virus underway committees worked diligently to finalize bills that range from the regulation of pesticides to funding higher education to the Global Warming Solutions Act. There was much focus on COVID-19 related legislation as well and the House passed three major funding bills. These included the miscellaneous tax bill, the supplemental budget adjustment bill and the capital bill.

There is still a long way to go before the legislature can recess until they return to finalize the FY2021 budget in August in this unprecedented legislative session. No doubt the stimulus for the economy will be a major focus in the coming weeks.

MISCELLANEOUS CHANGES TO LAWS RELATED TO VEHICLES (S.339)

The Senate passed S.339 this week. The [bill as introduced](#) contains numerous changes to Title 23, motor vehicle statutes. The Senate Transportation Committee advanced the bill before the State House closed on March 13 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Senate Transportation Committee proposed an [amendment](#) that passed. The amendment, which appears on the Senate Journal for May 21st, contains a few “must pass” items from DMV, including allowing driver’s learners permits to not have a picture unless the learner’s permit is obtained in person, in which case it does need a picture. It also contains the extensions of three sunsets in Title 23 as reported last week.

TRANSPORTATION BILL (H.942)

The House Transportation Committee continued discussing the Transportation Bill (H.942) this week. The Transportation Bill is on the House calendar as they moved it out of committee in March before the State House closed. The committee is developing a strike all amendment to incorporate COVID-19 related changes to the bill. As of this writing on Friday afternoon they had not completed their work on the amendment.

FROM THE LEONINE BLOG

SOCIAL DISTANCING CREATES REMOTE NOTARIZATION BOOM

Wills, titles, mortgages, powers of attorney, medical directives, affidavits and more – all of these legal documents and many more require the signature of a notary public in order to have a binding legal effect. Without notarizations, key pieces of the economy and our judicial system would grind to a halt and be more susceptible to fraud. The pressing need for these services has been underscored by the ongoing crises, and, recognizing its importance, states have taken decisive action to keep the wheels turning on this important issue over the last two months.

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