



Week 11 - March 25, 2022

THE VERMONT **STATEHOUSE INSIDER**

Weekly politics & analysis
of the issues in Montpelier



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FLOOR SESSIONS

The House and Senate held lengthy floor sessions this week as lawmakers held

one vote after another on a backlog of bills. The FY2023 budget bill, transportation bill (T-Bill) and capital bill all received floor votes in the House this week as did a major bill relating to workforce development and many other policy bills. The House worked deep into the evening on Wednesday and Thursday to try to clear its calendar so the Senate can receive and start work on the budget and other bills as the final phase of the 2022 legislative session approaches. The Senate was busy on the floor as well, as a number of bills from crossover were queued for votes. In addition there was a joint session for judicial retention on Thursday, making week 11 the most floor-heavy week so far. The result was a relatively light week for committee work.

The FY2023 budget that received final approval by the House today is the largest proposed budget in Vermont history, exceeding \$8 billion for the first time. This is in large part due to strong General Fund revenues and hundreds of millions of dollars in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. On Monday the House Committee on Appropriations voted 11-0 in support of the FY2023 budget (now H.740). The budget makes major investments in workforce development, fighting climate change, housing, state IT infrastructure, broadband and shoring up the state employees and teachers pension funds, among other things. The T-Bill also sets records with large increases in paving, bridge maintenance and alternative transportation upgrades and initiatives. The Capital Bill, H.739, allocates \$21.5 million for expanding cell service coverage.

One of the highest priorities for the governor and legislature this year has been workforce development. The House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development has spent the bulk of the session working on H.703, a wide-ranging bill that aims to address the state's most urgent workforce needs. Healthcare workforce and in particular the state's nursing corps are a top priority in H.703. The bill includes millions of dollars in grants for nurse faculty and preceptors as it is widely recognized Vermont needs to significantly enhance the nursing pipeline. Loan forgiveness and financial support for nursing students are also included in the bill and the Green Mountain Care Board is given the flexibility to exclude hospital investments in nursing workforce development initiatives from budget growth calculations. In addition to healthcare workforce, H.703 invests in college graduates

who commit to work in Vermont, career and technical education, upskilling and training in the trades, recruitment and many other workforce initiatives.

The Joint Rules Committee continues to consider whether to maintain or relax the mask requirement for the statehouse. With the Senate's return to in-person legislating and as more members of the media and lobbyists return to the statehouse, pre-pandemic norms are starting to make their way back into the legislative session. Lawmakers who have voiced opposition to continuing the mask mandate point to the current state and federal guidance, which no longer calls for masking in most scenarios. Still, some lawmakers have reservations about removing the mask requirement, citing the small meeting areas, the rise of a new variant and the growing number of people coming into the building. The Joint Rules Committee will continue to discuss the mask mandate when they reconvene next week.

TRANSPORTATION BILL

This week the House passed a \$866 million transportation bill, [H.736](#), An act relating to the Transportation Program and miscellaneous changes to laws related to transportation. The bill appropriates funding for Vermont's roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure and also makes significant investments in the rollout of electric vehicles including incentives for Vermonters to purchase EVs and EV charging infrastructure. Here is a [Section-By-Section summary of H.736](#). Here is a [link to a chart](#) outlining the spending in the bill.

AGENCY OF PUBLIC SAFETY

This week the Senate passed S.155, An act relating to the creation of the Agency of Public Safety. The bill elevates the Department of Public Safety to the agency level and puts some law enforcement divisions under it. However, it

falls short of consolidating all public safety services in state government in one place. Instead, the bill requires that by October 15, 2023, the Secretary of the Agency of Public Safety shall study “the effectiveness, efficiency, and delivery of State public safety law enforcement services and shall report to the governor and the General Assembly on the feasibility and advisability of transferring the operations of the Department of Motor Vehicles certified law enforcement officers, Department of Fish and Wildlife certified law enforcement officers, Department of Liquor and Lottery certified law enforcement officers, the Capitol Police, and the Department of Labor relating to VOSHA, Project WorkSAFE, and Passenger Tramway Safety to the Agency of Public Safety.”