

Week 5 - February 4, 2022

THE VERMONT **STATEHOUSE INSIDER**

Weekly politics & analysis
of the issues in Montpelier



GROUNDHOG WEEK

The Senate Committee on Appropriations finalized their work on the FY2022 Budget Adjustment Act (BAA) this week. The FY2022 BAA appropriates more than \$350 million in new funding, which is significantly more than prior mid-fiscal year adjustment acts. This largess is due in part to the nearly half billion dollars in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding that is available to continue to address the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

The Scott administration and legislative leaders have identified the need to support health care providers through workforce and retention efforts as a

major priority for the session. The governor proposed \$25 million in BAA for workforce retention bonuses and the House more than doubled that amount to \$60 million with the use of ARPA funds. The Scott administration raised concern with the \$60 million number, and generally takes the position that ARPA funding should be used for projects and initiatives that require one-time funding. Over the past two budget cycles the governor has proposed using ARPA funds to respond to climate change, upgrade water systems, deploy broadband, stimulate economic development and support housing.

The Senate Committee on Appropriations supported the framework offered by the House and approved the \$60 million for healthcare workforce benefits. The Senate made the language more stringent by requiring benefit recipients to commit to continuing to work for their employer for 12 months.

The committee also removed funding from the BAA that the governor had proposed for the Vermont Housing Improvement Program, and have indicated they intend to add the funding to a new version of a rental registry bill that was previously vetoed by the governor. This sets up a showdown between Democratic lawmakers and the administration over whether to increase regulation of landlords. The BAA also appropriates \$55 million to combat homelessness and support affordable housing initiatives.

The BAA allocates millions of dollars to workforce development efforts beyond healthcare including funding for training and close to \$20 million for the Vermont State Colleges System for scholarships and free tuition.

Workforce development is emerging as a top-tier issue for the 2022 legislative session. The House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development has already dedicated a great deal of time taking testimony and discussing how to incentivize growth in the workforce. Career and technical education has been a focus for both the House Committee on Commerce and the House Committee on Education this session. Recruitment and retention have been central to these conversations, along with discussions of how to match employers with qualified employees.

The House Committee on Government Operations spent the week taking testimony from local officials on redistricting. Municipal officials from Franklin, Addison, Rutland, Grand-Isle and Orleans counties weighed in with the committee, which is mulling how to redraw House districts and considering whether to stick with two-member districts or move to a legislative map made up solely of single-member districts.

The Senate Committee on Judiciary approved S.30, a bill that would prohibit firearms in hospitals and also close the “Charleston Loophole,” which allows a gun to be sold without a background check if the check takes longer than three days. The House required the sale to be suspended for up to 30 days, after which a firearm could be sold if the background check is still not completed. The Senate Committee on Judiciary took it a step further and struck the 30 day provision, meaning a firearm could not change hands until a background check is complete, no matter how long it takes. The bill passed the Senate and returns to the House, which can concur, ask for a conference committee, or propose further amendments. It remains to be seen what Governor Scott will do if the bill in its current form lands on his desk. The governor has indicated he does not support further changes to the state’s gun laws but has stopped short of saying he will veto the bill.

MOTOR VEHICLE FRANCHISE AMENDMENTS

The Senate Committee on Transportation will be hearing from their attorney Anthea Dexter-Cooper regarding a draft bill amending Vermont’s motor vehicle franchise law on Tuesday, 2/8. We expect the committee will hear from all sides regarding VADA’s proposed amendments and those proposed by the Alliance of Automotive Innovation. Anthea summarized the proposals from both parties in

[this document.](#)

DMV MISCELLANEOUS BILL

The Senate Committee on Transportation moved [S.280](#), the DMV miscellaneous bill late last week. Senator Chris Pearson, P-Chittenden, offered an amendment on the Senate floor regarding the total abstinence program and the use of medical cannabis. The Senate passed over the bill this week to allow the Senate Transportation Committee to hear testimony on Sen. Pearson's amendment next week.

DRAFT T-BILL RELEASED

Transportation Program and miscellaneous changes to laws related to transportation.” The bill makes various changes to transportation laws including provisions related to electric vehicles and authorizing appeals from Transportation Board decisions to the Vermont Supreme Court instead of the Superior Court. Motor vehicle franchise law disputes will be affected as the Transportation Board has jurisdiction over them.