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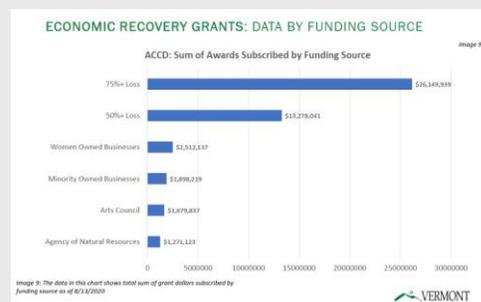
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### [Legislature Returns for Budget Session](#)

The Legislature will return remotely on Tuesday to complete the unfinished three quarters of the State budget, make changes to existing COVID-19 related relief programs, and possibly turn to other perennial issues unrelated to COVID-19. Over the next few weeks the Legislature will predominantly focus on completing the remainder of the State budget. Scott Administration officials have already begun briefing the Governor's own budget proposal to appropriations committees in the Legislature. The Governor's plan, which requires legislative approval, includes an additional \$133 million in relief for businesses hardest hit by the COVID-19 related economic downturn. There is currently \$200 million remaining from the federal CARES Act, which originally provided Vermont with \$1.25 billion in relief. The Vermont Chamber continues to argue that these funds should be used for direct economic relief purposes.

### [Changes to Grant Programs Announced](#)

The Vermont Chamber supported the advancement of \$176 million in economic relief grants in June. To date, State programs delivering those grants have provided more than \$100 million to over 3,500 businesses. While a significant portion of the original funds remain, it is not for lack of need. As a result of narrow eligibility criteria and the original caps on overall grant awards, many businesses were either ineligible for the relief programs or only able to receive relatively small allocations of relief. The Scott Administration worked to remedy some of the problems with eligibility criteria, including by allowing owner/employees who receive a W2



to apply and by raising the overall amount a business can receive. The Vermont Chamber helped advance both of these changes. Additional changes are needed. The Vermont Chamber will continue working with state leaders to address these problems and to add additional funds to state relief programs for industries hardest hit by the pandemic, like lodging and restaurant entities.

#### **[Vermont Chamber Priority Lodging and Restaurant Relief Fund Proposed](#)**

Governor Scott's recently released budget proposal for the remaining three quarters of the fiscal year includes a request for \$133 million from Coronavirus Relief Fund reserves currently sitting in the State's coffers to be used for additional business relief grants. The proposal includes \$50 million for the lodging and restaurant industries specifically. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Vermont Chamber has communicated to state leaders the reality that Vermont's lodging and restaurant industries have suffered disproportionately because of restrictions impacting occupancy and diminished visitor throughput. State economists recently quantified this in reports to legislative committees. The Governor's proposal requires legislative approval and the Vermont Chamber will continue advocating for the advancement of these essential relief funds.

#### **[Governor's Budget Proposal Includes More Childcare Funding](#)**

The Scott Administration's budget proposal includes an additional \$12 million for childcare resources. The funds would be drawn from federal relief money provided to Vermont in the CARES Act. The Vermont Chamber is supportive of efforts to improve childcare resources in Vermont and advocated for childcare resources at the federal level. Strengthening Vermont's childcare apparatus is essential to maximizing workforce participation and improving the long-term economic health of Vermont.

#### **[Latest Relief Proposal Includes Additional Marketing Fund and Buy Local Campaign](#)**

Governor Scott's latest economic relief proposal includes \$10 million for marketing Vermont to visitors from regions deemed safe by the Department of Health. The Vermont Chamber has long argued that Vermont falls far behind other state's in New England regarding state investment in tourism marketing. In June, the Legislature provided additional funds to the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing for related purposes, and the Administration's latest proposal would build upon the earlier investment to aid Vermont's economy and strengthen our tourism industry in the future. The Governor's proposal additionally includes \$50 million for a program that would provide Vermonters with \$150 to spend at local businesses.

#### **[Governor's Budget Plan Includes Funds for Broadband Buildout](#)**

With the ongoing connectivity crisis impacting thousands of households because of telehealth, learn- and work-from-home requirements, the Vermont Chamber is continuing to push for expanded broadband access to underserved communities. Over the last several months our team met with public and private stakeholders, school officials, and others to guide our advocacy on this issue. In June, the Legislature advanced a connectivity package

of \$43 million, with much of those funds dedicated to building out internet access in unserved areas. Part of the Scott Administration's recently proposed budget also includes an additional \$2 million for the Public Service Department for Grant Distribution to Communication Union Districts for broadband buildout efforts.

### [Act 250 Reform Legislation Anticipated](#)

Act 250 changes attached to a housing bill failed to advance before adjournment in June but are anticipated to resurface during the August/September session. Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy who originally added the amendment proposing the change to the housing bill reintroduced those changes in the form of an amended version of the Act 250 reform bill that was passed by the House in March. The Vermont Chamber was encouraged by the advancement of uncontroversial provisions in the Senate's earlier Act 250 proposal. Unfortunately, what was previously a widely agreeable bill expanded in late June to include several concerning provisions that could significantly increase the scope of Act 250 jurisdiction. The Vermont Chamber will continue working to ensure communities, both urban and rural, do not suffer negative economic impacts because of any final changes to Act 250.

### [Global Warming Solutions Act Remains Unfunded](#)

H.688 creates the ability for a citizen to sue the State if it fails to reduce greenhouse gas pollution to not less than 26 percent from 2005 greenhouse gas emissions by 2025, not less than 40 percent from 1990 greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and not less than 80 percent from 1990 greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The legislation also establishes a council to develop necessary policy recommendations to achieve these goals. Unlike original drafts of H.688, the version advanced in June did not include funding to facilitate operation of the climate council. It is anticipated that legislative leaders will work to advance funding for the program when they return next week.

### [Resource Roundup](#)

The Vermont Chamber staff has spent hundreds of hours on COVID-19 Zoom calls, conference calls, and webinars learning so that we can answer your questions in this ever-changing time. Collectively, we have had thousands of individual communications with members and non-members during the crisis. We can help you, too. [Contact us](#) with questions and we will get you answers. We have also seen excellent content from our members and Vermont agencies, which we are compiling weekly in our [Resource Roundup](#). If you have content to include, please send information to [news@vtchamber.com](mailto:news@vtchamber.com). Thank you for your continued support.



### [In Case You Missed It](#)

**Grant Applications Show Lodging Industry Is Hardest-Hit Sector in Crisis**

**State Economic Recovery Grants Increased to \$150,000**

**Weekly Unemployment Claims: VT Down, U.S. Up**

## **The SHRM VT State Council Needs Your Help!**

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In business since 1912, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce is a private, not-for-profit business organization with 1,500 members employing 45,000 people and representing all sectors of the state's economy. Our mission is to create an economic climate conducive to business growth and the preservation of the Vermont quality of life. Copyright ©2018 The Vermont Chamber of Commerce. All Rights Reserved.

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