



State to Main

The Voice of Vermont Business



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Vermont Chamber Prompts Additional Restart Guidance

In response to business community inquiries about Governor Phil Scott's recent order which permitted certain additional reopenings, the Vermont Chamber worked with the Administration to generate clarifying guidance. The new guidance enables out-of-state workers to commute to an essential job in Vermont or commute to a job in compliance with the Phased Restart Work Safe Guidance if that worker commutes directly to and from their work site. The changes also allow the use of break rooms if required social distancing and cleanliness measures are adhered to. The Vermont Chamber has received hundreds of similar inquires over the past several weeks and we continue to field these questions directly to Administration officials so that safe and sustainable solutions can be developed.

Phased Business Restart Continues

Governor Scott has released Addendum 12 to the Stay Home, Stay Safe Executive Order, which includes updated mandatory health and safety guidelines for the continued phased restart of businesses in the state. It also updates guidance for outdoor businesses, construction, manufacturing, and distribution operations. The Agency of Commerce and Community Development has also released a Memorandum to Businesses and Employers that provides additional clarification on Addendum 12.

Clarification Provided on UI Experience Ratings

In early March, the Vermont Chamber advocated for passage of a bill that relieved employers of charges against an employer's unemployment insurance (UI) experience rating when a business reduced or furloughed staff because of COVID-19. While passage of the bill served as welcomed relief for many businesses, uncertainty remained around whether instances of partial unemployment would also qualify for UI charge relief. In response to inquiries by the Vermont Chamber, the Department of Labor clarified that the bill allows for charge relief for weeks of partial unemployment, if the reduction in hours was attributable to the pandemic.

Senate Passes Bill to Expand Workers' Compensation

The Senate passed a bill that would implement temporary changes to workers' compensation coverage that would remain in effect during the State of Emergency and for up to 45 days after. If passed into law, the changes would provide a presumption that certain workers diagnosed with COVID-19 are entitled to workers' compensation. The legislation advanced despite little being known about the impact these changes could have on an employer's workers' compensation insurance rates. The Vermont Chamber is communicating with House legislators to advocate for a result that does not place unsustainable additional costs on businesses, many of which continue to struggle financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Way Forward on Broadband

Last week, Vermont Chamber President Betsy Bishop published an op-ed that called for reimagining Vermont as a work-from-home capital. One of the barriers to achieving this goal, also identified in the op-ed, is the lack of broadband connectivity in many Vermont communities. Cost estimates for resolving this problem remain around \$300 million, and efforts to build out broadband infrastructure have routinely encountered difficulty. With the COVID-19 pandemic making working and learning from home the new normal across the state, officials from the Department of Public Service (DPS) have proposed a potential \$293 million solution that would take advantage of federal relief funds. The Vermont Chamber is excited about the prospect of bringing broadband connectivity to Vermont's underserved rural communities and fully supports the DPS Broadband Development Plan.

Senate Advances Essential Worker Hazard Pay Bill

The Senate Appropriations Committee advanced \$60 million in essential worker hazard pay legislation. The intent of the legislation is to provide grants to certain essential workers for up to two months. Under the proposal, eligible employees include grocers, pharmacists, trash collectors, dentists, childcare workers, homeless shelter staff, and others who are required to interact with the public in some capacity. If passed into law, money for the program would be drawn from the state's Coronavirus Relief Fund, which was created with the \$1.25 billion provided to Vermont in the federal CARES Act. Employees who work over 108 hours a month would receive a \$1,000 monthly grant and employees who work at least 34 hours a month will receive \$600 monthly. An estimated 33,500 workers would qualify for some of the \$60 million.

House Passes Evictions Bill

The House passed legislation this week that temporarily bans certain foreclosure and eviction proceedings. S.333 largely mirrors a string of similar actions by county courts following the Vermont Supreme Court's Judicial Emergency Declaration on March 16. Under the bill, foreclosure evictions would be restricted during and for up to 30 days after the conclusion of the State of Emergency. Prior to this legislative action being taken, financial institutions and landlords throughout Vermont proactively indicated they would not be proceeding on foreclosure orders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Congressional Delegation Urges Treasury to Provide Clarity on PPP Loan Forgiveness

In response to widespread business community uncertainty about the extent of loan forgiveness that will be authorized under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders, and Representative Welch sent a letter to the Treasury and the Small Business Administration urging leadership in D.C. to provide additional guidance. In April, the Vermont Chamber sent a letter to Vermont's congressional delegation advocating for additional PPP funding and also for changes that would better guarantee loan forgiveness in situations where employers use the program to provide pay increases. The Vermont Chamber is routinely communicating with the congressional delegation with concerns raised by the business community about federal relief resources.

Vermont Chamber Readies Manufacturing for Phased Reopening

As restrictions are further lifted and phased reopening efforts continue, Vermont's \$3 billion manufacturing, fulfillment, and distribution sector will require explicit guidance on health and safety requirements mandated by the State to resume operations. The Vermont Chamber, along with the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center and industry partners, has been appointed to a sub-taskforce supporting Governor Scott's Restart Vermont Guidance Advisory Council. The sub-taskforce is charged with developing phased reopening policies related to manufacturing. The sub-taskforce is also actively involved in long-term economic recovery planning.

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. It is likely 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, send links to news@vtchamber.com. Thank you for your continued support. We are in this together.

In Case You Missed It

[DOL: Unemployment Claimants Called Back Must Accept Suitable Work](#)

[Vermont Manufacturing, Fulfillment, and Distribution Sector Reopening Plan](#)

[Vermont Could Lose \\$430 Million in Revenue Next Fiscal Year, Economist Says](#)

[Labor Dept. Provides First Round of PUA Payments to Vermonters](#)

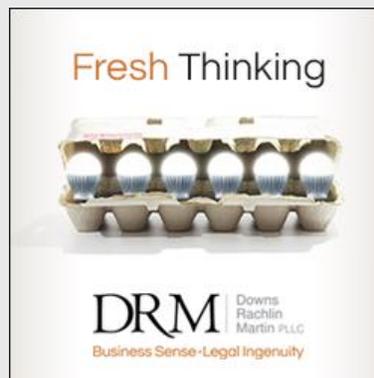
[Winemakers and Brewers Worry About Surviving Expected Summer Losses](#)

[As Vermonters Return to Work, Who Will Take Care of the Children?](#)

[UVM Telecommuting Survey – Is Telecommuting Here to Stay?](#)

Researchers at the University of Vermont are examining prospects for telecommuting now and in the future. The survey results are meant to guide additional research into the opportunities and obstacles for continued telecommuting. Responses are confidential. Fill out the survey [here](#). More background [here](#). Contact [Richard Watts](#) at UVM with questions.

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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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