



State to Main

The Voice of Vermont Business



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[Second Round of Relief Money Advances](#)

The Legislature's initial relief bill, S.350, provided \$70 million to businesses impacted by COVID-19 related restrictions and closures. Using the framework established in S.350, the House advanced an additional round of funding that would direct another \$70 million in grants to businesses that have suffered a 50 percent or greater reduction in revenue in a monthly or quarterly period from March 1, 2020 to September 1, 2020 as compared to the same period in 2019. This bill also separately provides an additional \$31.5 million for various specified sectors and business types. The Vermont Chamber has advocated for the expeditious advancement of additional, widely accessible relief funds for businesses, and we applaud the Legislature for acting quickly to advance this latest relief bill. More relief is needed. Over the coming weeks, the Vermont Chamber will continue to advocate for additional funding for the business community.

[Relief Bill Includes Hazard Pay](#)

A \$20 million hazard pay grant program was added to the most recent relief package. The program would provide grants to certain employers for the provision of hazard pay to frontline workers whose job placed them at an elevated risk of exposure to COVID-19 during the first two months of the public health emergency. Eligible employers include employers who employ one or more individuals in Vermont in an assisted living residence, a nursing home as defined, a residential care home, a therapeutic community residence, a health care facility, a physician's office, a dentist's office or dental facility, a homeless shelter, a home health agency, a federally qualified health center, a rural health clinic or clinic for the uninsured, a program licensed by the Department for Children and Families as a residential treatment program, an ambulance service or first responder service, a

morgue, or a provider of necessities and services to vulnerable or disadvantaged populations.

[Legislature Advances Broadband Package](#)

The Legislature recently advanced a funding package that would help address the connectivity shortfall impacting 70,000 Vermont households that do not have access to federally defined broadband. As currently drafted this broadband proposal represents an unprecedented investment in delivering connectivity to unserved locations throughout Vermont. While the Vermont Chamber is supportive of investing in this magnitude to ensure Vermont's communities have sufficient internet access, we have concerns about provisions in the relief package that would limit the use of funds to specific technologies. We believe public investments in broadband should be technology-neutral and include public and private partnerships that maximize institutional knowledge and capitalize on existing infrastructure, while planning for future technology landscapes.

[Act 250 Progress a Mixed Bag](#)

In the last several weeks modernization efforts of Act 250 have resulted in mixed progress. The Vermont Chamber was encouraged by advancement of uncontroversial provisions in the Senate's earlier Act 250 proposals that would largely remove municipal areas of enhanced designation from Act 250 jurisdiction. Unfortunately, in recent days, what was previously a widely agreeable bill has expanded to include several concerning provisions that could significantly increase the scope of Act 250 jurisdiction. The most recent changes include the addition of sections related to forest fragmentation and rules that would bring newly constructed roads and driveways totaling more than 2,000 feet into Act 250 jurisdiction. The Vermont Chamber will continue working to ensure communities, both urban and rural, are not negatively impacted by any final changes to Act 250.

[First Quarter Budget Bill Advances](#)

After passing in the House earlier this month, the Senate approved a budget bill that would fund state government for the first three months of the fiscal year. The Scott Administration previously proposed a 2 percent reduction in state spending for the first quarter to account for COVID-19 related revenue shortfalls. House and Senate Appropriators largely rejected that proposal, choosing instead to refrain from significant state spending cuts in hopes that federal CARES Act dollars will be permitted to be used for revenue replacement. Federal regulations currently do not allow CARES Act relief to be used for revenue replacement. Separately, as part of the Pay Act, state employees will receive an average 1.9 percent step increase and a \$1,400 one-time payment to individuals employed as of July 1, 2020 and an average 1.9 percent step increase and 2.25 percent across-the-board increase for a total 4.15 percent increase in Fiscal Year 2022.

[Workers' Compensation Changes Under Review](#)

As drafted, the most recent bill proposing changes to workers' compensation law could broadly expand COVID-19 related workers' compensation eligibility to jobs outside of the emergency services realm. The proposed changes have the potential to impart considerable cost impacts on employers. The Vermont Chamber is advocating for limiting the scope of the bill to frontline workers involved in emergency response and public safety. Testimony on the proposed changes will continue 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. 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](#)

[Capacity Limits Raised for Restaurants, Other Hospitality Businesses](#)

[A Crowded Field as Two Chittenden County Senators Seek Higher Office](#)

[Registration Opens for U.S. Chamber of Commerce Summit on Equality of Opportunity](#)

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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.

Vermont Chamber of Commerce, 751 Granger Road Barre, VT 05641, 802-223-3443

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