https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2020/H.965
https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/Docs/ACTS/ACT136/ACT136%20Act%20Summary.pdf

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Act No. 136 (H.965). Appropriations and finance; health care; human services

An act relating to health care- and human services-related appropriations from the Coronavirus Relief Fund

This act appropriates a total of $326,850,000.00 from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) for necessary health care- and human services-related expenses incurred due to, or as a result of, the COVID-19 pandemic. The remainder of this summary describes each of the specific appropriations comprising that total amount.

The act appropriates $28,000,000.00 to the Agency of Human Services to provide grants to certain public health, health care, human services, and public safety employers for the provision of hazard pay to their employees who were engaged in activities related to mitigating or responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency and whose job placed them at an elevated risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19, or both, during the first two months of the COVID-19 public health emergency in Vermont. The act appropriates $275,000,000.00 to the Agency of Human Services to establish the Health Care Provider Stabilization Grant Program to award grants to health care professionals and facilities providing health care services in Vermont. The act directs the Agency to develop a prioritization methodology to determine grant award amounts based on specified criteria and requires the Agency to report on the Program to the legislative committees of jurisdiction by August 15 and October 1, 2020 and January 15, 2021.

The act directs the Department of Health to use an existing federal grant to the greatest extent allowable to provide subgrants to community organizations to engage with specific populations most likely to experience adverse outcomes from COVID-19 based on factors such as race or ethnicity, immigrant status, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, and geographic location. It also appropriates $500,000.00 to the Department to provide monies to the subgrantees to help them meet the essential needs of members of these populations for food, shelter, health care, and emotional support. The act directs the Department to seek insights and recommendations from the subgrantees, along with the recommendations from the Governor's Racial Equity Task Force, to enhance and expand upon the Department's previous work in addressing health disparities in Vermont and to consider ways to include members of affected populations in its future work.

The act acknowledges the Department of Mental Health's pending federal grant application for suicide prevention and directs the Department to notify the General Assembly if it does not receive the grant and of any need for and availability of CRF monies for suicide prevention initiatives. The act appropriates $200,000.00 for a grant to Pathways Vermont to operate its peer warm line 24 hours per day, seven days per week until December 30, 2020 and to conduct outreach to health care providers and others across Vermont to make them aware of the warm line and encourage them to use it.

The act addresses food insecurity by appropriating $4,700,000.00 from the CRF to the Department for Children and Families for distribution to the Vermont Foodbank for purposes such as purchasing food and other necessities; providing subgrants to partner food shelves and meal sites; and for additional personnel, supplies, materials, warehouse space, delivery services, and equipment to meet the increased need of Vermonters for access to food as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The act designates up to $12,000,000.00 of a previous $50,000,000.00 CRF appropriation for reimbursement of COVID-19 costs incurred by school districts related to continuing meal delivery services to children during the months of June, July, and August in 2020. It requires the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living to submit a report to the Joint Fiscal Committee pertaining to funding for nutrition services for Older Vermonters and other vulnerable populations.

The act appropriates $12,000,000.00 from the CRF to the Department for Children and Families for the purposes of providing additional restart grants to summer camps, afterschool programs, and child care providers; the cost incurred by Parent Child Centers in responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency, including the increased demand for services by impacted families; and funds to address the immediate needs related to providing Children's Integrated Services, including information technology training and the provision of equipment necessary for telehealth services. It requires a one-time report to the General Assembly regarding the specific distribution of these funds.

The act appropriates $2,000,000.00 of CRF to the Department for Children and Families for the benefit of individuals made vulnerable by the COVID-19 public health emergency as determined by a needs-based assessment. The populations served by this appropriation must be households living below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, including families receiving Reach Up, older Vermonters, and individuals with a disability. The act appropriates $700,000.00 of CRF to the Agency of Human Services for distribution in equal amounts to the Association of Africans Living in Vermont and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants' Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program for various purposes related to COVID-19, including hiring outreach staff to communicate health and hygiene information related to COVID-19 in many languages.

The act appropriates $3,000,000.00 to the Agency of Natural Resources to cover the costs of implementing COVID-19 public health precautions on lands owned or controlled by the Agency and requires $120,000.00 of those funds to be allocated to the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to provide youths with employment opportunities by working on the public health projects. The act appropriates $750,000.00 to the Legislature to prepare for future operations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, including a space and health and safety needs assessment for the Legislative Branch and purchasing any equipment recommended from this assessment; purchasing COVID-mitigation equipment or making upgrades to the State House, including personal protective equipment and other health and safety equipment or infrastructure; and purchasing legislative information technology equipment, including any networking set-up required for the State House or new legislative space, camera and video set-up, and purchasing hardware, such as laptops and tablets. The act also directs the Department of Health to provide technical and planning assistance to Vermont's independent colleges regarding the reopening of their campuses and the return of students for the fall 2020 semester in a way that is consistent with public health.

Effective Date: July 2, 2020