

H. 969: FY 2021 State Budget

As Proposed by House Appropriations Committee - September 9, 2020

Vermont, as well as every other State around the country, is experiencing the dual challenge of revenues becoming less certain while, at the same time, the needs of the people are increasing. This is truly an unprecedented time for all of us and it has amplified the critical importance of the programs the State administers for the benefit of Vermonters.

The budget bill makes several strategic investments to minimize the impact of this epidemic on the people of the State by appropriating federal Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF).

This is a balanced budget that is consistent with House spending priorities, keeps reserves full, invests in local economies, does not cut programs, and preserves services to vulnerable Vermonters. Among key spending priorities are the following:

- Provides \$23,800,000 State funds to provide bridge funding to the Vermont State Colleges to allow the system to restructure and implement changes for the 2021/2022 academic year
- Adds \$293,339 for Micro-Business Development Program and \$170,301 for the Matched Savings and Financial Capabilities Program (formerly IDA's)
- Adds language to ensure equal access to appropriate mental health care equivalent to other aspects of health care by integrating public funding for inpatient mental health care services with funding for other health care services within the DVHA budget
- Funds the Community High School of Vermont with General Funds rather than Education Funds
- Adds \$100,000 for grant writing technical assistance to VHCB in the base budget
- Funds Retirement/OPEB obligations for State employees and teacher's retirement
- Provides \$1,500,000 GF and \$1,500,000 CRF for a total of \$3,000,000 to the Department of Public Service for grants to Communication Union Districts (CUD's)
- Provides \$250,000 to the Department of Public Service to develop a long-term telecom plan for a total of \$750,000
- Provides \$400,000 GF for Downtown Tax Credits for a total of \$3,000,000
- Provides funds to purchase a warning siren in case of a breach of the Chittenden Reservoir
- Funds maintenance and other needs of the Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation
- Restores \$40,000 to Outright Vermont in base budget for level funding from FY 2020 of \$60,000
- Adds language providing a waiver to the required number of school days for the 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19
- Adds language waiving the requirement that teachers obtain a license to teach on-line courses
- Provides \$1,000,000 TF for new Plug-in Electric Vehicle (PEV) Incentive Program
- Adds \$500,000 TF for incentives to increase public transit ridership
- Funds \$162,000 for the Court Diversion program in response to lost revenue due to COVID-19
- Creates a waiver for new enlistees in VT National Guard who would like to attend college funded with the VT National Guard Tuition Benefit Program but have not completed basic training due to COVID-19 related issues.
- Following priorities of the House, invested \$360,140 in Vermont's justice system
- Invests \$2,000,000 in the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) by aligning the program eligibility with current federal poverty guidelines and aligning provider rates in accordance with the five- year plan to increase access to high-quality affordable childcare for working families
- Adds \$613,000 to keep CCFAP eligibility determination and referral in the community.