

MARCH 2, 2021

TOWN MEETING REPORT 2021

State Representative Tanya Vyhovsky Chittenden 8-1

Town Meeting Update

It has been a wild start to the 21-22 biennium and I am told regularly how different from the norm, and "unprecedented," this year is. With virtual legislating, fast tracked voting changes, COVID relief packages, and a historic number of Vermonters and Vermont Businesses struggling we are facing a lot as a state.

Hunger Free Vermont produced a report which shows that 1 in 3 Vermonters are currently facing food insecurity. In an effort to help alleviate the impact on the Essex community, I will be running a March Fundraiser for our local food shelf, Aunt Dot's Place. The Vermont Hunger council says that monetary donations are the most cost effective way to support. They are then able to get what is most needed, when they need it, and can take advantage of deals and tax exempt status to stretch that money the furthest. If you are able to donate to the great work of feeding our community please do so from the link in this email or at my website. Additionally, I will be supporting the universal school meals (H.32) and a local food incentive (H.150) bills to further ensure our community members have access to the healthy food that they need.

As unemployment continues to be an ongoing struggle for many, please do not hesitate to reach out if you need help navigating this system.



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Government Operations Update

Government Operations oversees a large swath of legislation; from policing and elections, to municipal charters and pensions. We have moved the following bills:

- **Act 1 (H.48) an act relating to authorizing alternative procedures for 2021 annual municipal meetings in response to COVID-19**

Fast tracked so municipalities could change town meeting day in light of the ongoing pandemic (that's why you got a mailed ballot. You can vote on 3/2/20 at EMS if you prefer)

- **H.122 an act relating to boards and commissions**

Technical changes, ends some outdated boards, and allows the women's commission to advocate to the legislature.

- **H.135 an act relating to the State Ethics Commission**

Technical changes, staggers term expirations, and mandates administration financial disclosures occur yearly. A second ethics bill to codify a code of ethics and possible enforcement is still to come. To move the technical corrections they are separated.

- **H.151 an act relating to vital records, mausoleums and columbaria, and emergency health orders**

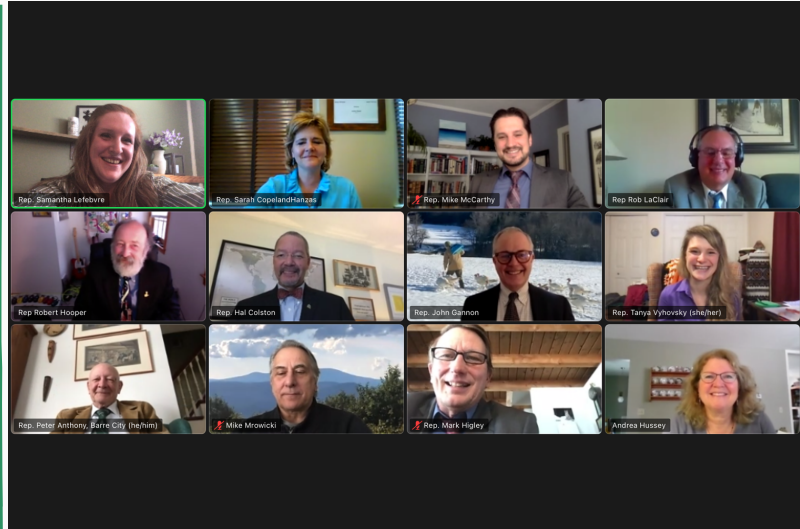
Changes in statute to make it easier for municipalities to manage their cemeteries and public health notices.

- **H.196 an act relating to supporting the work of the Executive Director of Racial Equity**

Statutory language for two new positions in the Office of Racial Equity. In order to move these positions forward quickly we will hold additional hearings on the independence of this office.

- **H.289 an act relating to professions and occupations regulated by the Office of Professional Regulation**

Changes the professions of funeral directors (making green burials easier), well drillers, pharmacists (requested by pharmacists), and teacher appeals (requested by the AOE).



- **H.337 an act relating to the printing and distribution of State publications**

Clarifies who receives state publications, allows the state librarian to authorize printing and distribution. In appropriations and will come to the floor for vote next week.

- **H.338 an act relating to reapportionment proposal deadlines**

Changes deadlines for reapportionment due to delays of census data, fast tracked to the senate.

- **H.R.7 - House resolution disapproving Executive Order 01-21 (Agency of Public Safety)**

Changes of this magnitude should receive full public input through the legislative process. Executive orders cannot be amended to solve concerns about the independence of the Vermont Criminal Justice Council, and those from officers on the ground who felt that was not fully vetted as an executive order. The administration has proposed legislation that is being explored in the senate government operations committee.

We have also held joint hearings with House Commerce about the unemployment struggles within the Department of Labor, with House Judiciary to hear about model use of force policy, and advised appropriations on the budget adjustment, the mini COVID relief bill and the big budget.



AFTER THE RECESS

Committee Work

General Assembly

H.171 an act relating to the governance and financing of Vermont's child care system

H.128 an act relating to limiting criminal defenses based on victim identity

H.210 an act relating to addressing disparities and promoting equity in the health care system

Transportation modernization

Broadband Expansion

Federal COVID Relief expected in mid March (from meeting with Congressman Welch)

Charters, Charters, Charters

After town meeting day it is charter day in Gov. Ops! Including the **Essex Charter**, 3+3 or merger based on the vote. In the queue are proposed changes to Winooski, Montpelier, Barre Town, Williston and Brattleboro and many more to come post election.

H. 293 an act relating to creating the State Youth Council

creates a youth council to advise state government on issues impacting youth. The youth in our state are doing amazing, hope inspiring work.

H.10 an act relating to permitted candidate expenditures

codify dependent care expenditures as allowable campaign expenses.

State Employees and Teachers Pensions

Continuing on preliminary work, we will take testimony to allocate \$20 million to OPEBs, and look at pension funding options. A summer work group is being considered to explore further with stakeholders. We are not simply taking the treasurer's report and enacting it.

Ethics Code

Hearing from the Ethics board on a code of ethics, education, municipalities, and enforcement.

Policing

Continued work on use of force policy, body cams and many additional needed reforms.

Corrections Committee Bill

A complex and multifaceted response to the Downs Rachlin Martin report making changes to corrections to protect those incarcerated, with liaisons from Gov. Ops (me), judiciary and human services.

And more after crossover depending on what comes from the senate!

Update

COVID-19 Mini Relief Bill Passed in House

After passing in the house last week H.315 is in the Senate, consisting of a package of economic relief funded by leftover COVID relief funds, and General Fund dollars. This interim relief bill is meant to bridge the gap between now and the next federal package we are expecting sometime this month. With provisions to support local businesses and some of Vermont's most vulnerable. It includes;

- \$10 million Gap Economic Recovery Grants to small businesses who were not eligible for PPP or EIDL grants. Includes sole proprietors and new businesses.
- \$10 million to the VT Housing Conservation Board to provide housing for those experiencing homelessness.
- \$5.3 million to the Department of Mental Health for emergency outreach, housing supports, case management, and training and wellness initiatives for frontline workers.
- \$700,000 for the Association of Africans Living in VT and the VT Refugee Resettlement Program to improve translation services and ensure access to workforce development and benefits programs.
- \$1.3 million for Reach Up to provide children and families in need support with job training and finding work.
- \$1,376,000 for the VT Food Bank to continue the VT Farmers to Families Food Box Program. This will be brought back to a local vendor after problems with the out of state vendor.
- \$100,000 to the VT Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to pursue technology solutions for social isolation.
- \$200,000 for data collection and analysis around health equity and health disparities.
- \$15 million for a school indoor air quality grant program with Efficiency Vermont
- \$2.2 million for the Department of Public Service for the Connected Community Resilience Planning Program.
- \$3 million to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets for the Working Lands Program to allow early funding of projects.
- \$10 million to the Agency of Natural Resources including
- \$5 million for the Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation VT Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC)
- \$5 million for the Central Office for investments to improve recreation infrastructure and accessibility to VT's trail systems.

Age 65 + are
now eligible for
vaccine
appointments.
Register online
or by calling:

855-722-7878





PRIORITIES, ANOUNCEMENTS & EVENTS

Ongoing Priorities

Elections Reform - H.269 an act relating to who can donate to a political campaign. H.226 an act relating to ranked choice voting, H.352 an act relating to allowing ranked choice voting in municipal elections, Universal Vote by Mail and Ballot Curing.

Public Safety - Substance treatment barrier reduction, police reform and community oversight. healthy food in schools, H.196 and act relating to supporting the director of racial equity, health equity, land equity, and reparations.

Environmental Justice - H.229 an act relating to green housing retrofits, transportation modernization, H.150 an act relating to local food incentives.

Transforming Systems - H.388 and act relating to education funding not reliant on property taxes, H.364 an act relating to privatization contracts.

2021 Community Conversations

Please join us on Zoom during the legislative session for monthly updates on bills, committee work, caucus activities & more. We welcome your concerns, questions and a spirit of open, respectful dialogue. A link will be provided before the meeting.

March 6, 9-10:30 am Sun.,
April 11, 2-3:30 pm Sat.,
May 8, 9-10:30 am Sun.,
June 13, 2-3:30 pm

I want to hear from you! There is a priority survey in this email and at my website: www.tanyavforvt.com