

2019
SOUTH BURLINGTON
LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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It is an honor to serve as your State Representatives: Ann as Chair of Human Services, Maida on Appropriations, Martin as Ranking Member of Judiciary, and John on General, Housing, and Military Affairs. Your feedback has been critical as we focused on advancing policies to enable our families and communities to thrive as well as building a Vermont that works for all of us.

Budget summary

The FY2020 Budget goes into effect on July 1, 2019. It is a balanced budget totaling \$6.1 billion. This represents a 2.6% increase over the FY2019 budget. It includes significant investments in the health of our natural environment; the development of our workforce and growing our economy; and the needs of vulnerable Vermonters, including shoring up critical provider systems. It includes the State's full annual contributions for the State pensions and retiree health care and medical benefits funds.

Reproductive freedom

Vermont's policy has long recognized that decisions related to reproductive health care and abortion are deeply personal and private, and are best left to an individual and their health care provider. As more and more conservative judges and justices are appointed in this country, and *Roe v. Wade* comes under continuing assault in state after state, the fact that Vermont has no laws on reproductive freedom became more worrisome. We addressed this issue in two ways, working in both the short-term and the long-term to protect women's reproductive rights. We passed legislation that codifies reproductive health care practice in Vermont as it is today and as it has been for more than 40 years. Essentially, it codified *Roe v. Wade* in our statutes. This is an immediate response. For the long-term, we initiated a process to amend the Vermont Constitution to make these rights - the right to choose or refuse sterilization, the right to choose to become pregnant and the right to choose abortion - permanent. The amendment process takes several years and culminates in a statewide referendum, giving Vermont voters an opportunity to have their say in 2022.

Investing in the Environment

Funding was secured to continue cleanup of our waterways, single use plastic disposable products were banned, polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) like those found in drinking and surface waters in Bennington County were regulated, and electric vehicle and charging stations incentivized. Weatherization efforts were

expanded, helping low and moderate income Vermonters save money and heating fuel by increasing the energy efficiency of their homes or apartments. The total budgetary investment in our environment is \$167 million.

Economic Development

Workforce development strategies provided training opportunities for small companies, decreased barriers for new Americans to enter the workforce, and provided advancement grants for additional adult training and workforce education. Broadband build out supported local municipalities determining appropriate connectivity solutions. Licensing and taxation for Vermont's burgeoning craft brewers and distillers were streamlined, enabling growth as well as providing a fairer and consistent tax base for the future. Transportation investments included paving, road maintenance, rail work, bridge construction, aviation, and public transit.

Protecting the vulnerable

Recognizing that safe, affordable, and secure housing is an essential component of healthcare for all, protections for victims of domestic and sexual violence were enacted to prevent survivors from being further victimized by facing homelessness or housing insecurity. For our Veterans, we focused on securing an honorable internment of any unclaimed Veterans' remains at the Vermont Veterans Memorial Cemetery and encouraging our 10,000 veterans deployed since 1990 to sign up to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Open Pit Registry.

Equity

As we seek to deal with systemic racism and implicit bias in our state, the development of a multicultural curriculum for all schools was the first bill signed by the governor this session. As well, Columbus Day was renamed Indigenous Peoples' Day, promising a more robust history for both indigenous and non-native Vermonters, celebrating the cultures, histories, and present-day lived experiences of Abenaki people and other original inhabitants of the Americas.

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Your Representatives look forward to meeting you over the summer at community meetings, block parties, and summer concerts. Please feel free to contact each of us.

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Reducing exposure to toxic chemicals

Thousands of toxic or untested chemicals are used in products we use every day in our homes, schools, and workplaces. These toxins are building up in our bodies and are contributing to alarming trends in public health, including increased rate of birth defects, developmental disabilities, reproductive disorders, cancers, and more.

We passed legislation requiring all schools and child care facilities in Vermont to test their drinking water for lead contamination, and then replace the taps if the water tests at or above 4 parts per billion. Lead is a toxic metal that's particularly harmful to children; it can impact their growth, brain development, and behavior. We took action after a 2017 pilot study identified the presence of lead in some school faucets. The plumbing fixture—such as taps or drinking fountains—was almost always found to be the source. The bill provides funding to cover testing, re-testing and a portion of fixture replacement costs. Vermont is leading the nation by setting one of the strictest standards for getting the lead out of our kids' drinking water.

Vaping and cigarette use by youth

We adopted a multi-prong approach to make it more difficult for youth to obtain and afford tobacco products. Data shows that 95% of cigarette smokers begin smoking before the age of 21 and it is well-established that nicotine is a highly addictive substance. Use of electronic cigarettes (vaping) is increasing at an alarming rate among high school and middle school students, prompting the Surgeon General to declare a public health emergency. In Vermont, we will tax e-cigarettes at the same rate as regular cigarettes. We also increased the legal age for purchasing cigarettes, including electronic cigarettes, from 18 to 21, joining 13 other states and finally we will prohibit the sale of electronic cigarettes over the internet.

Child Care

Ensuring parents can access high quality, affordable child care in our communities is critical to giving all of Vermont's children a fair chance at a bright future. Not only is it one of the most cost-effective ways to ensure the healthy development of children, it is an investment in families, businesses, the economy and most importantly our youngest citizens. We increased our investment in child care this year by \$7.4 million in order to make it more accessible and affordable to Vermont families. We increased the financial subsidies for low and moderate income families, provided funding for new and existing centers and training grants and scholarships to support the retention and professional development of child care workers.

Statute of limitation reform

Sexual abuse of a child often leads to depression, PTSD, alcohol and opioid abuse, and many other health problems. It is an Adverse Childhood Experience that can lead to years of negative impact on the victim. However, victims of childhood sexual abuse often do not disclose the abuse until long after it occurred. Victims are often ashamed of the abuse and keep it secret. They may suffer severe psychological and emotional damage that may not manifest itself until adulthood. Others develop an arsenal of defense mechanisms and may repress memory of the abuse for an extended period of time. The average age for disclosure of childhood sexual abuse is 52 years old.

Accordingly, the legislature passed a bill that eliminates the statute of limitations for bringing claims of childhood sexual abuse against the perpetrator or an entity that employed, supervised or had responsibility for the person allegedly committing the abuse if that entity failed to exercise reasonable care to prevent the abuse. Victims would be able to sue their abusers at any time, when they are ready to do so. The bill provides that the elimination of the statute of limitations for claims of childhood sexual abuse applies retroactively. That means that if a victim's claim is currently barred by the existing statute of limitations, after passage, the victim would be able to bring the claim.

Addressing addiction

Vermont has a nationally recognized and often replicated model for addressing opioid use disorder and yet every year since 2014 has had more accidental opioid-related deaths than the year before. Last year alone we lost another 110 Vermonters. Legislation passed this session which limits prior authorization for treatment by insurance companies will improve access to medication-assisted treatment and prevent delays and remove administrative barriers when people struggling with Opioid Use Disorder take their first step towards treatment.

Preventing substance misuse reduces the risks that contribute to alcohol, tobacco or other drug dependence, while promoting protective factors that support healthy lifestyles and communities. Effective prevention is not substance specific nor is it limited to schools or human service agencies. The role of the Chief Prevention Officer will be to integrate and build upon prevention efforts statewide, across all agencies of government and in areas that are not traditionally considered substance misuse prevention efforts in order to help Vermonters at all stages of life have the resources to make healthy choices and be connected to community and not become dependent upon substances.

Firearm violence prevention

The presence of a firearm dangerously compounds the risk of impulsive acts of violence, especially suicide. Waiting periods create an important cooling off window for gun purchasers to reconsider their intentions, which can lead to a change of heart and a saved life. In addition, waiting periods provide additional time for the completion of a thorough background check. This legislation, passed by both the House and Senate, would establish a 24-hour waiting period for the purchase of handguns.

In addition to providing a cooling off period, this waiting period addresses a gap in the law, known as "default proceed" or the Charleston Loophole. Federal law allows a dealer to deliver a gun to a purchaser as soon as a background check is completed, which usually takes only a few minutes. Sometimes, however, a background check may not be completed instantly. In such a situation, after three business days have passed, the dealer may still provide the firearm to the purchaser, even if a background check is incomplete. This bill would close this gap. The 24-hour waiting period would commence upon completion of the background check, including in those instances when law enforcement needs additional time to do its work, such as, for example, determining if the purchaser is subject to a domestic violence restraining order.