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GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE OF VERMONT
LEGISLATIVE JOINT FISCAL COMMITTEE

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

Minutes

Videoconference

Members present: Representatives Ancel, Fagan, Hooper, Lippert, and Toll and Senators Ashe, Cummings, Kitchel, and Westman.

Other attendees: Joint Fiscal Office and Administration staff and various viewers on live stream.

Senator Cummings, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m. and asked the Administration to present its Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) reallocation requests.

A. CRF Requests for Reallocation

Adam Greshin, Commissioner, Department of Finance and Management, reviewed the Administration's requests starting with #1, totaling $400,000, to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) and the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM) to extend the Restaurants and Farmers Feeding the Hungry Program, now known as the Vermont Everyone Eats program through December 30, 2020.

Senator Westman moved to approved request #1 (Everyone Eats), and Senator Kitchel seconded the motion. Representative Toll commented that the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development supported the request. The Committee approved the motion and the request on a 9–0–1 roll call.

Anson Tebbetts, Secretary, AAFM reviewed request #2, totaling $1,750,000, to AAFM to enable the Agency to issue grants to 36 qualifying businesses that have pending applications with the existing working lands program. Based on an internal review of the need for funding, The Secretary then presented a proposed amendment for $250,000 rather than $1,750,000.

Senator Kitchel moved to approve the request for $250,000, and Senator Westman seconded the motion. Representative Toll commented that the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, as well as the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development supported the request. The Committee approved the motion and the request as amended on a 9-0-1 roll call.

Commissioner Greshin reviewed request #3, totaling $13,200,000, to ACCD and the Department of Taxes (TAX) to fund Expanded Economic Development Grants unmet needs for businesses not included in the Accommodations and Food Services sectors (per NAICS).

At the request of the Committee, the Commissioner presented a revised proposal for request #3 of $11,500,000. Representative Toll moved to approve request #3 with the revised amount, and Senator Kitchel seconded the motion.

The Committee commented that after discussions in previous Committee meetings, it had hoped the Administration would submit a proposal for the additional funds requested to be more targeted to the small local businesses that were most affected by COVID-19. Responding to questions, Joan Goldstein, Commissioner, Department of Economic Development, explained that the Department had not expanded the allowable businesses within the NAICS code because its computer system was not capable of running two scenarios at one time and could find no path to do this. The Department was also concerned it would become too complicated and create mistakes. The Commissioner indicated that the Department planned to send checks to businesses on Thursday, December 17, 2020.

Senator Ashe concluded comments that it was important that businesses not be expected to have lobbying groups to secure funding. Representative Ancel asked that if there were additional funding and an extension of time from the federal government, that the application for businesses include opportunities for more descriptive sorting of the kinds of businesses applying for the grants. Representative Lippert asked for the percentage of the current unmet need of the businesses within the request, and Commissioner Goldstein responded that the additional funds to businesses from the $11.5 million request would increase the amount of the grants from 33% to about 41% of the unmet need. Senator Kitchel commented that the legislative standing committees should be included in any discussions if additional funding and time became available to the State to enable a more targeted plan to those businesses that were most in need.

The Committee approved the motion and the request of $11,500,000 on a 9–0–1 roll call.

Senator Kitchel mentioned that the Committee had received suggestions from standing committees on the need for funding in certain areas, such as the House Committee on Human Resources comments for funding to foster parents. The Committee did not have the authority to create its own proposals and instead, the Administration must submit a request to the Committee for review according to the process within Sec. B.1109 of Act 154 of 2020.

The Committee, having no further business, adjourned at 10:02 a.m. and agreed to meet on December 21, 2020.

Respectfully Submitted,

Theresa Utton-Jerman, Senior Staff Associate
Legislative Joint Fiscal Office
Link to recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlLRSGUIctQ