

2024 End of Session Report

Rep. David Durfee

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The House of Representatives has completed its legislative work for 2024. We enacted new statutes related to the environment, housing and land use modernization, healthcare, climate resiliency and much more. This report highlights of a handful of the bills that were passed and signed into law this year.

As your elected representative, I welcome your input and encourage you to reach out with your priorities, concerns, and questions. My contact information can be found on the back of this report. It is a privilege to serve our community in Montpelier.

-- David Durfee



Workforce Development

Vermont continues to experience a significant workforce shortage, especially when it comes to skilled workers in areas such as healthcare, construction and education. [H.707](#), passed with tri-partisan support, creates a new system to improve statewide workforce training. The Office of Workforce Strategy and Development will be led by an executive director who serves on the Governor's cabinet. The office will provide central oversight to all the workforce programs across state government and will take a comprehensive look at the workforce training system. H.707 also extends the work of the Special Oversight Committee on Workforce Expansion and Development created last year.

The FY25 state budget also invests in a number of key workforce development programs, including the 802 Opportunity program that provides free tuition to qualifying Vermonters at the Community College of Vermont (CCV); the National Guard Tuition Benefit Program; the Vermont Trades Scholarship Program; and education loan repayment programs for health care professionals.

Regulating "Forever Chemicals"

When PFOAs were discovered in local well water more than a decade ago, there was little public awareness of the prevalence and health risks associated with these and other "forever chemicals." Used most notoriously in the manufacture of non-stick and waterproof coatings, PFAS are also found in a wide variety of consumer and industrial products.

Today, there is a clearer understanding of the chemical nature of PFAS and their resistance to breaking down in nature. We also have even more evidence of their adverse impact on human health—affecting the endocrine and immune system, as well posing a risk to developing embryos and increasing the likelihood of cancer.

While the federal government has responded by lowering the allowable level of PFAS in drinking water, the Legislature has taken additional steps to reduce exposure to PFAS. [S.25](#), passed this spring and recently signed into law by the governor, focuses on products we may encounter on a daily basis, banning the use of PFAS in cosmetics, personal care products, menstrual products, textiles, clothing, apparel, artificial turf, cookware, and products marketed to children.

CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Who should pay for climate resiliency?

Last year's flooding caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damages to private homes and businesses, roads and bridges, agricultural crops, and state buildings in Montpelier. Climate scientists forecast more extreme weather in the future as the planet continues to heat up.

Adding insult to injury, the costs of cleaning up from these disasters—and building more resilient systems to protect against them—is borne largely by Vermonters. That may change, however, with the tri-partisan passage of The Vermont Climate Superfund Act.

Using the "polluter pays" model, large fossil fuel companies will be assessed a cost recovery fee that will be used to fund infrastructure projects in Vermont that are designed to be resilient and adaptive to the changing climate brought on by greenhouse gas emissions.

This groundbreaking bill was sponsored by the late Sen. Dick Sears and is modeled after the 1970s-era Superfund law that has been used to recover clean up costs for toxic chemicals.

Improving Dam Safety

Vermont has over a thousand dams, with only a few designed to control flooding. If not well-maintained, dams can create dangerous conditions downstream. To improve safety, the Flood Safety Act brings dam oversight under one agency, the Department of Environmental Conservation. It also updates the Unsafe Dam Revolving Loan Fund to finance more removal and repair, and funds more state engineering staff to inspections.

Generating Renewable Electricity

As the impacts of the changing climate are felt closer to home, Vermont is also taking steps to reduce carbon emissions. H. 289 updates the Renewable Energy Standard, setting a timeline for all of the state's electric utilities to supply power only from renewable sources by 2035—something that several utilities are already doing. It also requires that more of that clean power be generated in-state. The bill takes advantage of historic federal funding available for clean energy production and reflects a unique consensus among electric utilities, environmental groups and legislators to bring more renewable energy into the grid faster.

IMPROVING HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

Medicare Savings: Keeping More Money In the Pockets of Older Vermonters

Too many low-income aging Vermonters face a benefits cliff when they reach the age of 65 and transition from Medicaid to Medicare, with a sudden jump in premiums and copays for medical services and prescription drugs.

Beginning in January 2026, nearly 10,000 older Vermonters will become newly eligible for the Medicare Savings Program (MSP). These retirees will see an additional \$175 per month increase in their Social Security checks—more than \$2,000 each year, and \$4,000 for married couples.

Increasing MSP eligibility allows this benefit to reach many older Vermonters living on a fixed income. With an investment of \$4.7 million state dollars, this expansion will bring in significant federal support—nearly \$50 million of benefits for Vermonters and the providers who care for them.

This will spare some of our most vulnerable neighbors the great economic hardships that often accompany aging and retirement, and will allow close to 10,000 low-income Vermonters to focus on the care they need when they are sick, rather than on the financial stress of out-of-pocket costs. It will also allow an estimated 3,800 Vermonters access to a valuable prescription drug benefit for the first time at no cost to the state.

Addressing Youth Tobacco Use

Although it is illegal in Vermont to sell tobacco products to minors, the use of e-cigarettes and vaping products by children and young adults—especially in flavors like strawberry or watermelon—has been rising steadily. In March the House passed S. 18, which would have banned the sale of flavored vapes and cigarettes and strengthen enforcement. While the Health Commissioner testified in support of the bill, Gov. Scott expressed concerns with adopting an inconsistent approach to adult-use flavored products on the market—Vermont allows the sale of both flavored cannabis and alcohol—and over the expected loss of tax revenue. (Testimony indicated that the state would ultimately save much more in Medicaid costs than it would lose in revenue by enacting the bill.) The governor ultimately vetoed S.18, and lacking enough support in the Senate to override the veto, this bill will not take effect.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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H.766 - Reducing the Burden On Primary Care Providers

Vermont's healthcare providers spend an estimated 25 percent of their working hours dealing with insurance companies that too often second-guess their medical expertise. [H.766](#) will greatly relieve the red-tape burden on our primary care providers, allowing them to spend more time treating patients. That should result in shorter wait times and better health outcomes for Vermonters. H.766 will eliminate the time-consuming practice known as "prior authorization" for the physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners that we meet at local offices, clinics, and community health centers. Primary care provides the most preventative and least costly form of care in our healthcare system.

When your primary care provider decides that you need a test or referral, you'll no longer need to wait for your health insurer to take a second look at their decisions. Patients will get the treatment they need more quickly, while clinicians will be able to spend more time with patients, and less time on the phone with insurers or filling out paperwork.

H.766 will reduce costly delayed care that often accompanies a denied prior authorization, will reduce the need for imaging to be done at the more expensive hospital setting and will allow providers to redirect their staff to more patient-focused care, leading to more access and better healthcare for Vermonters.

2024 LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

This session, the General Assembly also enacted legislation that:

- ✓ Ensures a balanced budget and fully funds voter-approved school budgets for next year
- ✓ Adds new Superior Court judges and court personnel to relieve the criminal and civil case backlog
- ✓ Creates a new Division of Animal Welfare in the Department of Public Safety
- ✓ Increases reimbursements to EMS providers
- ✓ Supports public libraries
- ✓ Phases out neonicotinoids, pesticides that are harmful to honey bees and other pollinators
- ✓ Allows small poultry farmers to sell directly to customers
- ✓ Authorizes an overdose prevention center in Burlington
- ✓ Creates a new state mushroom, the bear's head tooth (*Hericum americanum*)
- ✓ Bans pet stores from selling puppies and kittens, which are supplied by puppy mills
- ✓ Provides water-quality grants to loggers

The information in this newsletter is compiled from reports prepared by various House committees, and is only a sampling of the legislation passed in Montpelier this session. If you would like more information on a particular issue or piece of legislation not covered here, please contact me.