



Town Meeting Update March 2019

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VERMONT STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Laura Sibilía

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

It is an honor to represent you in our State Legislature and to communicate the activities of the General Assembly to you in this Town Meeting update. This report is also available online at www.laurasibiliavt.com where it contains live links to supporting documents and sponsored legislation.

EDUCATION and PROPERTY TAXES:

Education Fund Outlook for FY2020 as of March 1st

- Board-approved budgets, submitted to AOE to date, indicate that statewide education spending will increase by almost 3.9% over FY2019.
- Per-pupil education spending will increase by almost 4.6% over FY2019 w/ statewide enrollment declines.
- Pending approval of school budgets by voters and final action by the Legislature, equalized education tax rates will be as follows:

	FY2019	FY2020	Change
Average homestead tax rate	\$1.499	\$1.512	\$0.013
Average tax rate on household income	2.48%	2.47%	-0.01%
Uniform non-homestead tax rate	\$1.580	\$1.594	\$0.014

- At these tax rates, the average education tax bill will increase by about 2.4% in FY2020
- The cost of Act 46 merger incentives will decline in FY2020 from about \$13 million to \$9 million.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS:

The House Energy and Technology Committee passed a Broadband Bill with a 9-0 tri-partisan vote. [H.513](#) establishes technical assistance in the form of a new position at the Department of Public Service (DPS) and grants of up to 60K for municipalities and Communications Union Districts to develop business plans for reaching all their residents with technology capable of 25/3 or better speeds. The governor’s budget also included loan loss reserves to back up 10.5 million dollars in Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) loans and statutory changes to facilitate easier bonding with private providers. The DPS will also conduct a feasibility study on the ability of Electric Utilities to use their infrastructure to provide broadband service.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE:

There are competing proposals being considered in Montpelier. **Governor:** Optional insurance plan with New Hampshire providing a maximum of 6 weeks coverage at 60% or employees’ wages up to \$1533.46 per week. **Legislature:** mandatory plan requires a .465 payroll tax on the employer and employees providing a maximum of 12 weeks coverage of 100% wages up to \$1067.20 per week.

MINIMUM WAGE:

A bill raising the minimum wage to \$15 and hour by 2024 passed the Senate by a vote of 19-8 and is headed to the House. Vermont’s current minimum wage is \$10.78 and is the [10th highest](#) minimum wage in the country and increases automatically every year. Washington, DC has the highest minimum wage at \$13.25.

ACT 250 and WATER QUALITY BILLS:

Significant proposals dealing with the rewriting Act 250 and Clean Water initiatives are underway in the House and Senate Natural Resources Committees. As we proceed further into the session and the details of these bills emerge from their committees, please let me know if you, your town or your businesses want to testify.

MARIJUANA:

The Senate recently passed a bill legalizing sales of marijuana and imposes a 16% tax on sales w/ a possible additional 2% local option tax. A Cannabis Control Board will be established for regulating and licensing all aspects of the marijuana supply chain, and to prioritize Vermont businesses owned by women and minorities for license applications. Growers licenses are to be issued by December 2020, w/ separate licenses for processing facilities, wholesalers and retailers phased in following that. The bill will next move to the House.

ABORTION ACCESS:

[H.57](#) recognizes a fundamental right to the freedom of reproductive choice for women. The bill does not change current practice in Vermont which has been in place for more than 40 years since the 1973 Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade. Partial or full birth abortions are specifically prohibited by the 2003 "Partial Birth Abortion Act" enacted by Congress, and which all medical providers must comply with. The bill does not change the ability of a woman to sue for wrongful death if something goes wrong during her pregnancy.

[Vermont statistics](#): indicated 1,298 abortions performed in 2016, which is less than 1% of all Vermont births for women ages 15 to 44. Overall, there has been a downward trend in abortion rates since the 1980s. 69.3% of all Vermont abortions were for pregnancies of less than 9 weeks duration and 91.7% of all Vermont abortions happened within the first trimester (12 weeks or less). Only 17 or 1.3% of Vermont abortions occurred in 2016 after 21 weeks. There are no third trimester abortion providers in Vermont. "Late term" abortions typically refer to abortions that take place above 20 weeks gestational age. Currently, there are only 2 providers who provide abortion services above 20 weeks in this state and they practice at a hospital which offers services up to 23 weeks. An ethics panel is convened prior to an abortion being provided over 20 weeks. There are virtually no abortion services available for patient's seeking termination past 23 weeks in Vermont (with a few rare exceptions at one of the two hospitals for significant threats to maternal or fetal health).

HEALTHCARE:

The Healthcare Committee is working on a [draft bill](#) that will address an Individual Mandate with a monthly penalty, and also look at the new Association Plans. This bill will get further attention after Town Meeting week.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS:

Proposed amendments to change the Vermont Constitution must originate in the Vermont State Senate and can only be proposed every four years. Amendments must earn a 2/3rds vote of the members of Vermont State Senate but require only a majority vote of members of the Vermont House of Representatives. Amendments, once adopted by the senate and house, must then be considered against at the next biennial session of the Vermont General Assembly. The amendment must win a majority vote of both chambers when it is considered for this second time. Such amendments then go on a ballot for a vote of the state's electors. If a proposed amendment wins a simple majority vote, it becomes part of the state's constitution. There are five proposed amendments which have been proposed for consideration during the 2019/20 Vermont Legislative Biennium:

- [PR.1](#) Elections; Governor; four-year term of office
- [PR.2](#) Declaration of rights; eliminating reference to slavery
- [PR.3](#) Declaration of rights; right to privacy
- [PR.4](#) Declaration of rights; equality of rights
- [PR.5](#) Declaration of rights; right to personal reproductive liberty
- [PR.6](#) Elections; Senators; four-year term of office

BUDGET:

FYI: The Administration invited comments both online and in writing during a seven-week period in November and December for the [Governor's Budget](#). During this time, Finance and Management received 105 responses (via SurveyMonkey) and 52 written comments: **16 comments** supported Farm to School and Early Childhood funding **10 comments** supported the continuation of funding for afterschool programs and **9 comments** supported increasing the level of funding for higher education.

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