

June 10, 2020

**Board of Directors**

Paul Cillo  
*President & Executive Director*

Tiffany Bluemle  
*Chair*

Ben Doyle

Jared Duval

Carlen Finn  
*Treasurer*

Steve Gold  
*Vice-Chair*

Scudder Parker

Sheila Reed, Esq.  
*Secretary*

Gaye Symington

Weiwei Wang

Sarah Waring

**Staff**

Jack Hoffman  
*Senior Policy Analyst*

Julie Lowell, Ph.D.  
*Policy Analyst*

Sarah Lyons  
*Communications & Development  
Director*

Stephanie Yu  
*Deputy Director*

Dear Member of the Vermont General Assembly:

As you build a plan to spend the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) monies that were allocated to Vermont, we hope you will use some basic guidelines in your decision making.

Vermonters are struggling. These funds, as with all state revenues, should be first and foremost used to meet the needs of the people of Vermont and to create a Vermont that works for everyone. **Rather than focusing on what the federal rules permit, we urge the Legislature and administration to focus on what Vermonters need.** It is likely that the federal rules for use of CRF money will change, maybe even this month, to allow greater flexibility, especially the ability to use the funds to backfill for the loss of state revenue resulting from the pandemic. And there may be additional federal funds coming to Vermont.

Even if the funds in the initial allocation cannot be used for certain purposes, we urge you to list all the needs you see, so that if and when funding criteria are broadened or more funding is available, other needs can be addressed.

**We ask that you focus on equity first.** CRF money should be used to help make Vermont racially just, equitable, and inclusive, so that the benefits of the economic recovery are shared by every person who lives in Vermont. This pandemic has uncovered and amplified inequities that have been present in Vermont and brought them into sharp focus. Now we have a chance to unravel these systemic inequities and take a step closer to a Vermont that works for everyone, no one excluded. We know that when governmental structures and services are more equitable, we as a state are better prepared to deal with future crises. This is the time for the state to make a significant investment in systems to identify, track, and correct inequities and in other work recommended by the Racial Equity Advisory Panel and the Executive Director of Racial Equity. We should also make sure that any investments first help those who have been oppressed through structural or systemic barriers in the past.

**Next, focus on Vermont families.** A second priority for use of the funds should be to help Vermont families to get back on their feet. The pandemic has created an extraordinary situation that will require Vermont to go way beyond anything it has done in recent history for its residents. The state needs to continue to invest in services, supports, and structures that secure our safety-net and help our families to be financially secure with the community connections and support they need.

**Whenever possible, provide direct support to families and to the organizations that serve families.** Funding must be increased as needed for state agencies and community partners providing services as caseloads increase or become more complex, even as the pandemic enters a different phase. Also, the state needs to be prepared to step in to provide income support to those who have lost their income as a result of the pandemic and may not qualify for existing programs, especially if the federal government fails to provide the additional necessary support. Providing direct assistance to Vermonters who are struggling to pay rent, utilities, and other costs because of the pandemic are currently allowed uses for the CRF money, and we should make use of the money for these purposes.

**Third, provide support for employers that continue to employ Vermonters.** Another way that the state can support Vermonters is through employers. The priority for any aid to employers should be that they continue to employ their workers, pay them fair wages and benefits, and contribute to Vermont's overall economic well-being. It's important that the state provide assistance to employers that are in need in a way that ensures that they meet these goals.

**Finally, keep Vermonters engaged and informed.** We ask that you continue to be transparent in your deliberations about the use of these substantial funds and encourage public engagement as much as possible throughout the process. We appreciate the legislature's commitment to transparency during this challenging time, and we know you are on a short timeline. We know that engaging Vermonters in this process will produce better ideas and results for Vermont and increase the public trust in our government as the state recovers from this crisis. This trust will be critical to our ongoing success.

Thank you for your commitment to the people of Vermont and for your consideration of the ideas presented in this letter, which has been endorsed by the organizations noted below.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Cillo  
President



James Duff Lyall  
Executive Director

Cc: Gov. Phil Scott, Lt. Gov. David Zuckerman



Michelle Fay  
Executive Director

VERMONT  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
ADVOCACY ALLIANCE  
Matt Levin  
Executive Director

vermont  nea  
THE UNION OF VERMONT EDUCATORS  
Jeff Fannon  
Executive Director

