



# **Economic Services Division Community Meeting**

**Presented by: Miranda Gray, Deputy Commissioner,  
Economic Services Division, DCF**

# Economic Services' Mission and Vision

## Our mission:

To provide high quality service while administering programs to improve economic well-being for Vermonters.

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## Our vision:

Vermonters thrive with a sense of independence and connection to their communities.

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<https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd>

# American Sign Language Interpretation Availability

ESD Staff and Vermont's deaf and hard of hearing clients now have weekly access to an ASL interpreter

**Tuesdays and Thursday 1-4:00, via Teams**

While accessing an ASL interpreter is best practice, ESD recognizes it is ultimately up to the client how they want to proceed. A client may choose to utilize a family or someone else to facilitate communication. The client may also choose to communicate through writing.

Vancro Integrated Interpreting Services has also helped spread the message about this new change to the deaf and hard of hearing population in Vermont through their list of contacts and social media.

# ESD Legislative Updates

- **Budget Adjustment Act (BAA):** The BAA, which makes mid-year changes to the state budget, has been vetoed twice by Governor Scott—mainly due to disagreements over the Hotel-Motel Voucher Program. Without a BAA, the state continues operating under the original budget.
- **H.91 – Emergency Temporary Shelter Program:** This bill aims to redesign the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program through regional collaboration and oversight from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). It passed the House and is now being reviewed in the Senate. The administration is expected to continue shaping the bill's language during this phase.

# Supplemental Food Program Federal Updates

There are no known cuts at this time to the SNAP (3SquaresVT) program. However, there are signals that potential cuts are coming.

Changing the benefits and the basic eligibility requirements of SNAP require Congressional action.

The federal House and Senate are currently working on a budget reconciliation process to set limits on federal spending and targeted spending cuts. Forecasted cuts to the SNAP program over a 10-year period range from \$1 billion to \$230 billion.

The final amount along with specific policy changes to accomplish these spending cuts will be determined by Congress.

# Reach Ahead Pilot Closure

The Reach Ahead Pilot will conclude on June 30, 2025. The program will return to pre-Pilot Reach Ahead rules and benefit levels on July 1, 2025:

## Reach Ahead

- 24 cumulative month limit
- 6 month look back eligibility window
- \$50 food benefit for first 12 months then \$5 for remaining 12 months
- \$300 job retention payment at 6 months from start of employment
- Case management and/or career coaching
- Support services to maintain employment

# Reach Up Program Federal Updates

Temporary Assistants for Needy Families (TANF) is Reach Up's federal program.

- TANF has not announced any immediate changes we are continuing to receive the TANF funds and will be issuing benefits as planned

Office of the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) closed the region 1 office, which serves Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

- For Reach Up this means we do not have a current federal contact, our regional reps are no longer available.

# Fuel Assistance Updates

Applications are accepted year-round – Households can still apply in April and beyond.

**New income guidelines effective 3/1/25** are being used for eligibility determination.

## **Two-step notification process:**

- First letter: Confirms eligibility upon approval.
- Second letter (November): Details benefit amount and the certified dealer receiving the payment.

## **Refund & Consumption Reports**

**Certified Dealers** must submit reports on funds received for eligible households and how those funds were used. They report on covering:

- Gallons purchased and cost during heating season (11/1/24 – 4/30/25)
- Plus, Gallons Purchased and cost for Full-year (5/1/24 – 4/30/25) for federal reporting.

## **Fuel Team now moves into "Audit Season"**

### **Certified Fuel Dealers Audits**

- Random selection from Refund & Consumption Reports.
- Must provide client statements & delivery tickets.
- Discount off Retail dealers → Must submit daily pricing sheet.
- Margin over Rack dealers → Audited based on posted prices.

### **Wood & Pellet Household Audits**

- Households must provide receipts for purchased wood/pellets. Letter will be mailed to selected households on May 1st.

### **Crisis Fuel Program Audits**

- 2 Crisis Fuel Programs are selected each year, which allows us to do a deeper dive into the work they are doing.
- Cases are selected off the monthly trackers. Once notified the Community Action Program provides application, all worksheets, and support documentation on why they found the household eligible.



# Fuel Assistance Federal Updates

## Changes at a National level:

- On March 27th, Health and Human Services announced the reduction of 10,000 additional Federal Employees and through reorganization will move from 28 divisions to 15. The Department of Energy Assistance was eliminated.
- The LIHEAP Program was not. Only Congress has the authority to do that. In Vermont , LIHEAP funding is Heating assistance, Crisis assistance, Weatherization, Furnace repair and replacement and Fuel tank repair and replacement. In warmer climate states, it is cooling assistance. Historically LIHEAP has had bipartisan support, so although the Administration might be looking at repurposing dollars, Congress has supported LIHEAP for over 45+ years.
- FFY26 funding, we don't know exactly what it will look like next year. We are hoping for the best (level funding = 20-22 million) but also discussing what it will look like if we receive less.
- Vermont is committed to assisting Low Income Vermonter's get through the winter.

# ESD Call Center (BSC)

Since starting our new process on March 10<sup>th</sup>:

- Average General Queue wait time for March was 22 minutes.
- Average Interview Unit queue wait time in March was 21 minutes.
- For April, the General Queue wait time is 13 minutes and the Interview Queue wait time is 14 minutes.

What is this doing?

- Allowing us to build capacity so we can process cases even beyond our oldest document in OnBase.
- Stay ahead and get ready for the busy months so we are starting ahead instead of catching up thus getting Vermonter's benefits faster.

# Collaborations

ESD works to collaborate with community partners to achieve our mission. To provide high quality service, we want to meet Vermonter's where they are at and assist them, when possible, to access benefits.

## Examples of what's possible

- Barton – Currently, a Benefits Programs Specialist is present and available to assist Vermonters at the monthly food distribution site which is co-located with local primary care. Staff provide assistance to those wishing to apply or to those already receiving benefits who have questions.
- St. Albans – A Benefits Programs Specialist is present and available to assist Vermonters at the Notch Clinic in Richford monthly. A Reach Up Case Manager uses the same space on a different day. We have seen an increase in Vermonters utilizing staff in the past couple months.
- Tabling – We are available to provide resource information at job fairs or local community resource fairs

If you have an idea, reach out to the District Director in your region to discuss what is possible!

**Stay  
Connected**

**Meet our  
District  
Directors:**

**Melinda (Mindi) Bussino** for Springfield and Brattleboro offices

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**Laurie Pion** for St Albans and Newport offices

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**Julie Mazzariello** for St Johnsbury and Hartford

offices. Email: [Julie.Mazzariello@vermont.gov](mailto:Julie.Mazzariello@vermont.gov) Phone: 802-585-6486

**Sarah Butterfield** for Bennington and Rutland offices

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# Stay Connected

Sign up to join our listserv to receive meeting invites and updates about ESD programs:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/newsletter>

# Questions?

Please raise your virtual hand, or type your question in the chat

**Next Meeting: August 2025**

Thank you for joining us!