

Newsletter



Legislative News

We are officially halfway through the legislative session where bills need to move out of their first committee of jurisdiction and onto the other chamber for consideration. Legislative Leadership will continue to push priorities – paid family leave in the House, and universal childcare in the Senate – and legislators and advocates alike will continue to push their priorities as well. Some priorities that have made it to the top of the pile of bills include paid leave, universal childcare, banning flavored tobacco, universal school meals, housing, environmental conservation, and expansion of the bottle bill to name a few.

There are now two paid family leave bills being considered in the Vermont statehouse. One in the House and one in the Senate. The House version, as passed out of the Ways and Means Committee, would established a mandatory paid family leave program that would allow employees to take up to 12 weeks of leave for several reasons ranging from family care, to birth and adoption, to military care and safe leave. The upfront cost exceeds \$100 million and will cost \$117 million annually, paid by a .55% payroll tax, split evenly between the employer and employee and provide employees up to \$1,135 per. The Senate version, would provide offer 12 weeks of paid leave for new parents, apply to all genders and be available in the case of both births and adoptions.

Sen Kitchel, (D-Caledonia) the sponsor of the Senate version reports that the benefit could cost \$15 million a year, a very preliminary estimate, and would provide the benefit to families earning below 600% of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, that's \$180,000 a year.

While touted as the top priority of the legislature this year, the HOME bill, S.100, was cautiously celebrated as it passed out of the Senate Economic Development, General and Housing Committee just about a month ago. The bill would have eased restrictions and red tape when it comes to building the much-needed additional housing around the state. However, the Senate Natural Resources Committee has drastically altered the bill's impact. Among other changes, the Senate Natural Resources Committee altered the scope of changes surrounding the land-use law which in this bill allows for the ability to build 25 units (instead of the current 10) of housing within five years and a five-mile radius. Now that development is only limited to designated downtowns, designated neighborhood development zones, and designated growth centers. The amendment also limits the increase from 10 to 25 units to a 3-year time period.

The bill that would make universal school meals permanent across the state has passed the House Ways and Means Committee this week. (cont. on next page)



Legislative continued

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H.165 also brings a \$29 million price tag, which will be reviewed by the House Appropriations Committee in the coming days. Currently, the cost to cover the annual bill comes from the education fund, which means additional increases to property taxes. A perennial discussion on how to pay for such programs usually brings about discussion about taxes on goods and services, such as candy, sugar sweetened beverages, cloud taxes, etc.. Further discussion and pushback on an increase in property taxes is expected and we will continue to monitor the proposal as it moves forward.

The House Ways and Means Committee has passed an amendment to this year's version of the **Bottle Bill**. The bill proposes to establish a producer responsibility organization to manage and oversee the bottle bill and would expand the scope of the bottle bill in 2027. The bill includes an amendment that would allocate \$3 million of the unclaimed deposits to the clean water fund and any remaining funds to the PRO to assist in standing up the

program until 2027, exempts direct-to-consumer wine bottles from the redemption system as well as the need to sticker/label the need to for redemption, among various technical changes. Prior to being considered by the full House, the Appropriations Committee next week will review the fiscal impact to the state budget. The Joint Fiscal Office estimates that there will be an initial decrease in funds allocated to the Clean Water Fund, but that will change in 2026 and 2027.

Dram shop legislation that will assist bars, restaurants, distillers, brewers, and wineries that have tasting areas, etc. when it comes to liquor liability insurance, has passed its preliminary committee in the House and is expected to move swiftly through the House. Currently, Vermont statute makes no reference to negligence, which places significant liability on the establishment when it comes to serving an intoxicated person. Language in H.288 would make it more palatable for insurance companies to provide coverage to these businesses by shifting from a strict liability law to a negligence standard for liability. VRGA has heard that some bars have lost their coverage due to the lack of a negligence standard, while others have stated that the strict liability law causes their liability insurance to be exceptionally expensive.

The Senate will soon vote on S.18, the bill that would **ban the sale of flavored tobacco products** in the State of Vermont. Governor Scott in a recent press conference reported that he is not against the concept of the bill, and a majority of the Senate is leaning toward supporting a ban. While the Joint Fiscal Office has released numbers showing an anticipated impact of only a \$4 million loss in revenue to the State, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers report that the implications are much higher.

Bills will be moving quickly for the remainder of March. Be sure to stay up to date on bills that we're watching here.

Become a VRGA Sponsor

An impactful way to support our members and the work we do.

To learn more about specific options visit our website here or email info@vtrga.org.



Sponsors
Welcome

Association News

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SEE YOU IN JUNE!



Learn, connect, and grow with VSFA

Join the VSFA community on June 6th for a day-long networking and education conference at the Mountain Top Resort in Chittenden. This event provides retailers and distributors access to nearly 100 Vermont-based food producers, and is a valued opportunity for members to connect with each other while learning ways to sustain, grow, and manage their business.

[Learn more and register.](#) Educational sessions coming soon. [Sponsorships are available.](#)



Catch up with members, staff, & Board of Directors

Spend the evening of June 6th catching up with members, staff, and our Board of Directors while enjoying cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and conversation. During the event we'll present our Annual Meeting Presentation, induct new board members. We hope to recreate last year's pairing where you'll enjoy Vermont-made food and beverages.

[Learn more and register.](#) Become an [Event Sponsor.](#)



Help us raise funds for our Scholarship Program

June 7th we'll raise funds for our Annual Scholarship Program during our Scholarship Golf Tournament at the Green Mountain National Golf Course in Killington.

Each year VRGA awards scholarships to help members' employees and/or their dependents further their education. [Learn more and register.](#)

All Sponsorships can be claimed through our [registration form.](#)

Welcome New VRGA Members!

We'd like to give a warm welcome to our newest members.

- [Bar Harbor Bank & Trust](#)
- [Brave Little Spice Co.](#)
- [& Maple](#)
- [Moksha Farm](#)
- [Myer's Bagels](#)
- [Trenchers Farmhouse](#)
- [Angry Goat Pepper Co](#)

Funding & Education

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Tax Credits for Vermonters: Share with your employees!

These new and expanded tax credits may provide you with a refund or reduce the amount of taxes you owe. Please visit this website for more information about Vermont tax credits, how to file online for free using Free File, and where to get free filing assistance through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) programs.

She means Business - Women Business Event in Brattleboro

March 23, 2023 - 10am to 7pm

Celebrate Women's History Month & Women-Owned Businesses in southern Vermont with this series of free workshops and a reception for woman-owned businesses and aspiring woman entrepreneurs.

Held at The Stone Church located at 210 Main St. in Brattleboro, the day includes business planning and branding workshops, speed networking event with lenders and resource providers, downtown Brattleboro business owners and an evening reception. All activities are free, but registration is encouraged.

[Learn more and register here.](#)

Enhanced Rebates for Commercial LED Lighting Projects

If you are considering upgrading the lighting in your business to LED, now is a better time than ever to complete a project! In partnership with Vermont's Regional Development Corporations, Efficiency Vermont is offering enhanced rebates to support Vermont businesses in upgrading to qualified LED lighting in 2023.

Projects may be eligible to receive one of two special lighting rebates covering a portion of project costs as follows:

- 75% of equipment and installation costs covered, up to a maximum rebate of \$10,000
- Projects with 500 or more linear tube LEDs (TLEDs): 100% of equipment cost covered

This program is designed specifically with small- and medium-sized businesses in mind, to support business lighting upgrades before Efficiency Vermont's rebates for commercial lighting change next year (visit efficiencyvermont.com/bizlighting to learn more). However, any business may apply.

Please review the [application form](#) for eligibility requirements and instructions on how to apply. Applications will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until April 30, 2023, or as long as funding is available



2023 Scholarship Program

Application Deadline is April 21st, 2023.

Providing financial assistance to eligible students entering their first year at an accredited two or four-year school in the US.

Member Benefits

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Business Insurance Program

MMG Insurance offers a comprehensive and competitive insurance program designed for your business. Exclusive 5% discount for members.



Multi-state 401K Program

Provide great retirement plans to yourself and your staff, without the high cost, liability, and time drain of paperwork oversight. Member Chris Henry, President of The Medical Store, shares, "we ended up saving over \$12,000 annually" [Learn more.](#)



Dental Insurance

Access to a variety of affordable plan options with no minimum enrollments. Plans starting at \$38/mo.



Credit-Debit Card Processing

New programs where you pass the processing fees onto your customers are available. [Members report a savings of 10-40%.](#)



HR, Policy, and OSHA Guidance

Looking to reduce your workers comp rate or develop an employee handbook? The Richards Group can help with everything from planning and document preparation to OSHA certification for employees and owners. [Learn more.](#)



Vision Insurance

Low cost vision program with major benefits. Monthly premiums starting at \$5.95/mo.



Get the most out of your membership

The Vermont Retail and Grocers Association has partnered with these organizations after careful consideration and review. VRGA believes these organizations can offer superior customer service along with considerable savings to member businesses. In addition to these benefits, we offer a comprehensive package of services. [Learn more about our services here.](#)

[Discover benefits](#)

Payroll Services

A Vermont company offering easy and economical payroll services. Services include payroll checks, tax filings, reports, new hire reporting and more. Member discount & savings of up to \$150. [Learn more.](#)



For more information about various benefits please email info@vtrga.org.

ACORN Food Hub Taste the Valley Event

April 6, 2023 | 9:30-12pm
Middlebury College

This event seeks to bring together buyers looking to source more locally with local food and beverage producers interested in exploring more wholesale market opportunities.

If you are a retailer or distributor looking for Vermont food and beverage products this is a great opportunity to network with producers.

[Learn more and register here.](#)

Enter to be a Supermarket News Independent Superstar

Supermarket News new annual SN Independent Superstars list shines a light on those individuals who are going above and beyond when it comes to standing out as an independent grocer. We're looking for innovation, invention, and deep insights into the grocery space.

Deadline is TODAY! Enter by 11:59 p.m. EST on March 15. [Learn more and Enter.](#)

Egg Markets Overview

The USDA has released it's weekly publication of the USDA AMS Livestock and Poultry Program, Livestock, Poultry, and Grain Market News Division. [View and download the full overview here.](#)

Some takeaways include:

- "Consumer demand for shell eggs improved slightly into March but shoppers are finding few price breaks in the dairy case which is tempering shell egg movement."
- "Planning for anticipated needs for the upcoming Easter demand period – now less than 4 weeks away – are underway."
- "The overall inventory of shell eggs was down about 1.5% and the nation-wide inventory of Large eggs was down just under a half percent."

Digital grocery sales hit \$128B

Supermarket News reports that, "online grocery sales have settled down to a level below the high rates of 2020, but still well above pre-pandemic levels, and are expected to gain traction across a broader consumer base in the coming years." [Read more](#) on where this trend is going and how grocers can leverage the right tools for profitability.



What makes AG exceptional-
is the people.
We truly appreciate all they do.
Thank you for making
us shine so bright.

NOVEMBER
2022 Monthly Selection Record

25,946	23,813
12,083	13,812
279,619	

Associated Grocers of New England • (603) 223-6710 • AGNE.com
11 Cooperative Way • Pembroke, NH 03275
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[f](#) Associated Grocers of New England [i](#) @AGNewEngland [t](#) @AGNewEngland

 Associated Grocers of New England is a full service Cooperative Grocery Wholesaler supplying Supermarkets and Convenience Stores from Maine to New York.

Economy Shows Signs of Cooling as Bank Troubles Spread

"A drop in retail sales and easing price pressures in February offered preliminary signs of a cooling economy as the spread of financial turmoil on Wall Street called into question whether the Federal Reserve would continue raising interest rates," reports The Wall Street Journal.

Read further about how this is affecting the economy, high inflation, and various retail sectors.



Looking for something from a previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)

We can help you simplify your business banking.

We can help you streamline your cash management and increase profitability. Spend more time growing your business and less time making trips to the bank.

Contact me today to get started.



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Americans pulled back on their spending in February, after a strong January

CNN Business reports that, "Americans pulled back on their spending last month after a surprisingly spendy January. US retail sales fell 0.4% in February from the month before, the Department of Commerce reported on Wednesday. That drop, which was adjusted for seasonal swings, was greater than economists' expectations of a 0.3% decline, according to Refinitiv estimates."

Continue reading to learn which sectors had the largest monthly declines and what recent data on household spending and credit growth indicates for the future.

US retail sales point to underlying strength in the economy

"U.S. retail sales fell moderately in February, likely payback after the prior month's outsized increase, but the underlying momentum remained strong, suggesting the economy continued to expand in the first quarter despite higher borrowing cost," reports Reuters.

Other positives from the Commerce Department's Wednesday reports suggests that February saw solid job growth and, inflation news seems to be encouraging. Read the full article here.

FOR SALE

Coburn's General Store - South Strafford

216 VT Route 132 4,600+ sq ft on .75 acres MLS #4925510

\$1.35m (including additional rental income from branch bank and US Post Office)

A 100+ years landmark general store in South Strafford, including regular and non-ethanol gasoline sales; home to the village post office, and a Mascoma Bank branch with an exterior ATM. The store is the commercial hub of the community. A small commercial laundromat - with parking - is located on the lower level at the rear of the property.

Well stocked and clean, Coburn's features: a full line of groceries with an outstanding meat department and deli; household items; a VT licensed wine department and craft brews along with other beers; a hardware section; a variety of VT products and gift items; fishing and hunting licenses; lottery sales; and a local/regional events bulletin board.

This popular business has been owned and operated by the same family for over 45 years and enjoys wide support from residents and tourists, as well.

Additional information may be obtained with a signed non-disclosure agreement.

Contact information:

Terry Boone

terry@bassettregroup.com | 802.238.9393

Our classifieds section is free for members

Are you selling your business or equipment? Share with the VRGA community for potential interest. Please send your info to [VRGA staff](#) for inclusion in the next newsletter.

Association Staff is here to help!

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