

Newsletter



Session Overview

The 2024 Vermont legislative session officially adjourned just before 6 pm on Monday, June 17. This session was marked by significant legislative activity, culminating in a pre-scheduled veto session where both the House and Senate made attempts to override seven vetoes issued by the Governor. Remarkably, they succeeded in overriding six of these vetoes, reflecting a strong legislative push to enact key measures despite executive opposition. Throughout this challenging session, VRGA was diligent and proactive in representing the interests of retailers and grocers.

For more detailed information on the outcomes and implications of this legislative session, members can find the full legislative wrap-up [here](#).

Taxes

Property Taxes:

- Property taxes will increase by about 14% this year due to the Legislature overriding the Governor's veto of [H.887](#). VRGA stopped additional proposed taxes, including:
 - Removing the tax exemption from clothing over \$110 (\$6.8 million).
 - Imposing an excise tax on sugar-sweetened beverages.
 - Increasing the vape tax from 92% to 100%.

Local Option Taxes:

- Municipalities can now implement a Local Options Tax without state Legislature approval, simplifying the process ([H.546](#)).

Act 250 and Housing:

Passage of [H.687](#) is expected to reduce regulatory barriers for building workforce housing and make exemptions from Act 250 in villages and downtowns.

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Legislative News

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Retail Crime and Public Safety

Retail Theft:

- [H.534](#) implements a graded penalty system for multiple offenses, increasing penalties for repeat offenders.
- [S.195](#) lifts the \$200 bail cap and allows pre-trial monitoring for those with multiple offenses, allocating \$661,000 for the program.

Retail Mandates and Product Bans

Cash Transactions:

- VRGA squashed [S.175](#), which would have required businesses to accept cash transactions up to \$1000, citing insufficient data to support the need for the mandate.

Pets in Retail Stores:

- VRGA killed [H.853](#), which would have allowed customers to bring non-support dogs into any retail store, violating food safety rules and increasing insurance costs.

Chemical Bans:

- [S.25](#) bans certain chemicals in cosmetics, menstrual products, juvenile products, textiles, clothing, cookware, and artificial turf.

Labor Issues

Compensation Disclosure:

- [Act 155 \(H.704\)](#) requires employers to disclose compensation ranges in job advertisements by July 1, 2025.

Collective Bargaining Rights:

- [Act 117 \(S.102\)](#) allows employees to form a union without a secret ballot if a majority sign a petition. It also studies labor laws for agricultural workers.

Environmental

Bottle Bill Expansion:

- [H.158](#), which proposed expanding the bottle bill and creating a Producer Responsibility Organization, was vetoed and did not pass.

Climate Change Legislation:

- [S.259](#) seeks to hold large oil companies accountable for climate change damages, creating a “Vermont Climate Superfund.” This will likely face legal challenges.

Alcohol and Tobacco

Alcoholic Beverages:

- [Act 156](#) of 2024 allows retailers to obtain special venue serving permits for events, delays the requirement for liability insurance until July 1, 2026.

Flavored Tobacco Ban:

- The veto of [S.18](#) by Governor Scott was not overridden. The proposal to ban flavored tobacco and e-liquids is expected to be reconsidered in 2025.



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[AG](#) Associated Grocers of New England is a full service Cooperative Grocery Wholesaler supplying Supermarkets and Convenience Stores from Maine to New York.

Association News

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Specialty Food
& Beverage
Producers!

Showcase Your Products at the Council of State Retail Associations Annual Meeting!

VRGA is hosting our association counterparts and retailers in Stowe August 26-28th! Each year, association presidents gather to discuss legislative trends, and pointers to make sure that we're supporting and representing retailers in our trade associations.

Vermont Specialty Food and Beverage producers are invited to participate in a welcome tasting on Monday, August 26th, at Spruce Peak Lodge in Stowe for the Council of State Retail Associations Annual Meeting. Producers will have the opportunity to provide tastings to approximately 150 visitors from across the country including state trade association executives and representatives of national retailers, including Walmart, Target, Costco, Amazon, and more.

Event Details:

Date: Monday, August 26th

Time: 6:00 PM (Setup starts at 5:00 PM)

Location: Village Green, Spruce Peak Lodge, Stowe
The welcome receptions will include a buffet dinner where you have the ability to incorporate your products into the meal. Governor Scott, Vermont's congressional delegation, and other dignitaries will be in attendance well, providing producers a great networking opportunity.

Additional Promotion:

If you cannot attend, you can still promote your products by donating items for welcome bags. Products must be shipped or dropped off at the VRGA office by August 23rd and be TSA-approved sizes.

Learn more by emailing erin@vtrga.org or alyssa@vtrga.org

New Child Care Contribution Payroll Tax Begins for Vermont Employers and Self-Employed Individuals on July 1

Starting July 1, 2024, Vermont employers and self-employed individuals must pay the Vermont Child Care Contribution tax. Under Act 76 of 2023:

- Employers: 0.44% payroll tax on wages, with an option to withhold up to 25% from employees.
- Self-employed: 0.11% tax on self-employment income.

Employers will remit payments and report quarterly, while self-employed individuals will pay when filing their 2024 personal income taxes in 2025. Employees may see tax details on paychecks starting after July 1, 2024. Find more info [here](#).

Local Option Taxes Effective NOW

Effective July 1, Londonderry, South Hero, Waterbury, Westmore, and Woodstock have enacted 1% Local Option Taxes. Act 144 of 2024 removed the legislative approval requirement in which towns could impose a local options tax. Towns now have the ability to enact this tax based on a simple vote. For a complete list of municipalities with local option taxes, see [here](#).

The Vermont Department of Taxes publishes a newsletter four times a year. Sign up for the newsletter [here](#).

Funding & Education

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Critical Preparedness: Safeguarding Food Retailers Against Workplace Violence

September 12, 2024 | 2pm

Join FMI and their partner, TPOP, for a free digital seminar titled "Food Retailers: Are You Prepared for the Worst Type of Workplace Violence?" Active shooter incidents, though often considered low-probability, are increasing and can result in severe consequences, including loss of lives, financial damage, and brand harm. The expert panel, featuring industry and law enforcement professionals, will discuss the importance of having an emergency operations plan and the necessary training to reduce the impact of such attacks. Register [here](#).

WEBINAR: Using AI Tools in Business

July 11, 2024 | 1pm

Join this webinar to learn how AI can boost your business by enhancing customer service, optimizing marketing, and driving growth. Discover practical prompt engineering techniques, ethical AI use, and strategic insights for branding and market analysis. Gain knowledge on leveraging AI for innovation and maintaining a competitive edge. Register [here](#).

WEBINAR: Data Privacy and Your Business

[Watch Now](#)

In 2021, 63% of businesses reported a data breach – small businesses included. The impact is costly, averaging from \$120,000 to \$1.2 million. Learn how to approach your business data security, reduce human error, and close the door on hackers in this webinar. Vermont Law School Professor Jeannette Eicks and Sergio Alvares, Business Advisor from Vermont Small Business Development Center walk you through the steps of identifying what data you need to protect, how to safely handle customer data, and what to do if and when someone steals your customers' data.

WEBINAR: Managing and Having Difficult Conversation

July 16th, 10am

In every workplace, challenging conversations are inevitable. Whether it's addressing performance issues, navigating conflicts, or delivering tough feedback, having the skills to manage these conversations effectively is essential for every leader and team member. Learn proven strategies and techniques to approach challenging discussions with confidence and finesse. [Register here](#).

Recover Your Portion of Swipe Fees from the VISA/Mastercard Settlement

The deadline to submit your claim has been extended and is now August 30, 2024

VRGA has collaborated with DCAP Claims to aid members pressed for time in reclaiming swipe fees from the \$5.54 billion VISA/Mastercard settlement. If you've yet to file and seek assistance, DCAP is available to lend support. VRGA recently conducted a concise 20-minute webinar to furnish members with details regarding the service. Access the webinar [here](#) and reach out to DCAP for further assistance.

Watch it [here](#). Contact DCAP [here](#).

Summer EBT is coming to VT this summer. Summer EBT is a NEW program that gives families with kids \$120 in benefits per eligible child to buy groceries during the summer when school meals aren't available. These benefits can be used statewide at any retailer that accepts SNAP/EBT. That means more healthy food for our kids, and more money supporting our businesses, farmers, and growers!

MOST families who qualify will automatically get benefits because they participate in a program like SNAP. This means that most folks will know exactly how to use an EBT card at the register.

If you don't already have a sign at your door saying that you accept EBT/SNAP, Hunger Free Vermont will print, laminate, and mail you a sign free of charge. Email Ivy at ienoch@hungerfreevt.org.

Got questions about Summer EBT? [Click here](#).

Fluorescent light bulbs contain mercury—a highly toxic heavy metal—so they are banned from the trash in Vermont. When a fluorescent bulb breaks, mercury is released, so Vermont rules also require businesses to store bulbs carefully:

- When you change out a fluorescent bulb, immediately put the used bulb in a sturdy box and store it where it won't be damaged.
- [Learn the rest of the storage requirements and what to do if a bulb breaks](#) from the VT DEC, so you can prevent breakages, clean up a broken bulb properly, and protect your health.

Mercury-containing bulbs are collected for [special recycling](#) statewide, including free collection for residents, small businesses, and institutions (unlimited CFLs and up to ten general-purpose non-CFL bulbs per visit). Enter your zip-code at lamprecycle.org to find a collection location near you.

Tip provided by the VT Department of Environmental Conservation

Grocers Enhance Grab-and-Go Options Amid Consumer Demand

Grab-and-go food options in grocery stores have become more sophisticated, driven by consumer demand for convenience and quality. Grocers are now offering a wide variety of meals, entrées, and side dishes that emphasize consistency, freshness, and restaurant-quality standards.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the acceptance of pre-cut and pre-packaged options, with consumers seeking to limit their time in stores. As people return to work, the grab-and-go trend persists, offering convenient, diet-specific options like vegan, gluten-free, and high-protein meals.

Adapting to changing demographics, grocery stores are expanding their offerings to include a variety of dietary preferences and cultural cuisines. The sector's growth is supported by innovative merchandising strategies, such as placing complementary products in strategic locations to meet consumer needs for quick, varied meal solutions. Read more [here](#).

Member Benefits

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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](#).

Payment Solutions

Wix, a premiere website platform and POS solution, allows you to sell online and in store. Create a beautiful website with easy templates. [Contact us](#) to schedule a demo and receive special VRGA member rates.



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](#).



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](#).



Business Insurance Program

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



Vision Insurance

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



Dental Insurance

Access to a variety of affordable plan options with no minimum enrollments. Plans starting at \$41.75/mo.



For more information, please email info@vtrga.org.

Walmart's Shift to Electronic Shelf Labeling Signals Major Retail Transformation

Walmart's plan to implement electronic shelf labels (ESLs) in 2,300 stores by 2026, a move expected to significantly impact the retail industry. Walmart's scale, with over 5,000 supercenters and more than 1 million associates in the U.S., means this change could influence other grocers still using traditional paper tags. ESLs offer numerous benefits, such as rapid price updates, assisting online order pickers, and providing detailed product information, leading to operational efficiency and potential cost savings for customers. Suzy Monford of Food Sport International emphasizes that ESLs enhance transaction efficiency, reduce business costs, and foster a cycle of lower prices for customers. Read the full article [here](#).

Vermont Community Leadership Summit, Presented by Vermont Council on Rural Development Aug. 6th

Vermont communities have leaders who put themselves on the line for their town and for the issues they care about. On August 6, 2024, hundreds of these community builders from across the state, along with people from the non-profit, business, and government sectors, will come together to build skills, capacity, and connections. This event will be an opportunity to dig into what it takes for a community to thrive - capacity, economic vitality, emergency preparedness, youth engagement, inclusion, engagement, and more - and will offer a diverse range of topics tailored to support and connect people in all aspects of local vitality and resilience.

[Learn more here.](#) [Register here.](#)

May Retail Sales Surge: Strong Consumer Spending and Yearly Gains Lead Economic Growth

Retail sales surged in May, with significant month-over-month and year-over-year increases, as reported by the CNBC/NRF Retail Monitor powered by Affinity Solutions. The National Retail Federation highlighted strong consumer spending driven by a robust job market and real wage gains, despite persistent inflation in services.

Key figures from the Retail Monitor include:

- Total retail sales (excluding autos and gasoline) rose 1.35% month-over-month (seasonally adjusted) and 3.03% year-over-year (unadjusted) in May.
- Core retail sales (excluding restaurants, autos, and gasoline) increased by 1.2% month-over-month and 2.88% year-over-year.

These gains marked the highest month-over-month increases in over a year, contrasting with April's weaker performance. Total sales for the first five months were up 2.13% year-over-year, and core sales were up 2.48%. Read the full article [here](#).

May 2024 Retail Monitor

CNBC/NRF Retail Monitor, powered by Affinity Solutions



*Numbers based on the first 28 days in February.

Source: Affinity Solutions, Consumer Purchase Insights

Looking for
something from a
previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)



Jericho Center Country Store Sold to New Owners

After 22 years, the owners of Jericho Center Country Store in Jericho, Vermont, sold the beloved establishment on Monday, 6/24. The store, originally founded in 1807 as Blackman's Store by Pliny Blackman, has a rich history, offering staples like molasses, flour, sugar, rum, and farm supplies. It changed hands multiple times, notably being run by the Jordan Brothers and later by Gerry and Lil Desso, who turned it into a classic Vermont general store from the late 1960s through 1997. In 2002, the St. Amour family took over, focusing on high-quality, homemade food sourced from local vendors.

The current owners expressed a mix of emotions, feeling both bittersweet about saying goodbye and excited for new adventures. They shared deep appreciation for their many employees over the years, from high schoolers in their first jobs to hard working adults, including family members and short-term helpers. A special thank you was extended to their current full-time crew for their hard work and resilience during the transition period.



Aqua Vitea Kombucha recently announced the National Aqua Seltzer Summaahh Sweepstakes giveaway and local giveaways in partnership with Farrell Distributing throughout Vermont. Participating retailers will offer a Sweet Summaahh package that includes:

- Aqua Seltzer Retro Igloo Cooler
- 4 mixed cases of Aqua Seltzer
- A gift card for picnic essentials
- Extra Aqua Seltzer decals

The first spotlighted retailer is Jake's ONE Market in the Old North End of Burlington, VT.

Association Staff is here to help!

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