

No. 119. An act relating to reenvisioning the Agency of Human Services.

(S.183)

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

(a) Since its establishment in 1970, Vermont's Agency of Human Services has grown significantly in both size and scope. In its current form, the Agency is composed of six departments: the Department for Children and Families; the Department of Corrections; the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living; the Department of Health; the Department of Mental Health; and the Department of Vermont Health Access, along with several divisions and many offices, boards, and councils. The Agency's budget comprises more than half of the overall State budget, and the programs and benefits administered by the Agency and its departments have an impact on the lives of all Vermonters.

(b) The purpose of this act is to create a meaningful process through which the Agency, its departments, and the individuals and organizations with whom they engage most can collaborate to identify opportunities to build on past successes and to make improvements for the future.

Sec. 2. REENVISIONING THE AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES;

REPORT

(a) The Secretary of Human Services, in collaboration with the commissioner of each department within the Agency of Human Services and in

consultation with relevant commissions, councils, and advocacy organizations; community partners; individuals and families impacted by the Agency and its departments; State employees; and other interested stakeholders, shall consider options for reenvisioning the Agency of Human Services, such as restructuring the existing Agency of Human Services or dividing the existing Agency of Human Services into two or more separate agencies.

(b) The Secretary of Human Services and the other stakeholders identified in subsection (a) of this section shall evaluate the current structure of the Agency of Human Services, identify potential options for reenvisioning the Agency and engage in a cost-benefit analysis of each option, and develop one or more recommendations for implementation.

(c) The Agency shall solicit open, candid feedback from the stakeholders identified in subsection (a) of this section to inform the evaluation, identification of options, and development of recommendations. To the extent feasible, the Agency shall engage existing boards, committees, and other channels to collect input from individuals and families who are directly impacted by the work of the Agency and its departments.

(d) On or before February 1, 2025, the Secretary shall present to the House Committees on Government Operations and Military Affairs, on Health Care, and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on Government Operations and on Health and Welfare an update on the status of the

stakeholder process and development of recommendations as set forth in this section.

(e) On or before November 1, 2025, the Secretary shall provide the recommendations developed by the Secretary and stakeholders to the House Committees on Government Operations and Military Affairs, on Health Care, and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on Government Operations and on Health and Welfare, including the following:

(1) the rationale for selecting the recommended option or options;

(2) the likely impact of the recommendations on the departments within the Agency and on the Vermonters served by those departments, including Vermonters who are members of historically marginalized communities;

(3) how the recommendations would center the needs of and lead to better outcomes for the individuals and families served by the Agency and its departments and make the Agency more accountable to the Vermonters whom it serves;

(4) how the recommendations could improve collaboration, integration, and alignment of the services currently provided by the Agency and its departments and how they could enhance coordination and communication among the departments and with community partners;

(5) how the recommendations could address the workforce and personnel capacity challenges that the Agency and its departments encounter;

(6) how the recommendations could address the facility challenges that the Agency and its departments encounter;

(7) how the recommendations could strengthen the use of technology to improve access to programs and services, increase accountability, enhance coordination, and expand data collection and analysis;

(8) a transition and implementation plan for the recommendations that is designed to minimize confusion and disruption for individuals and families served by the Agency and its departments, as well as for Agency and departmental staff;

(9) a proposed organizational chart for any recommended reconfigurations; and

(10) the estimated costs or savings associated with the recommendations.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.

Date Governor signed bill: May 28, 2024