

VLCT Disaster Assistance Fund Coop Agreement – 4/25/24

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[Salutation]

Like many of us here, I grew up in a small town, and I've seen the late nights and long hours that our volunteer municipal leaders put in, and that's in a normal year. But when disaster strikes, many of our communities simply miss out on the opportunity to use federal funding because of the time and expertise needed.

In Vermont, our community-focused nonprofits, federal and state agencies, and regional economic development corporations nurture and maintain strong relationships. Many of these iron ties are forged in personal acquaintances and relationships; from kids' school and sports to former co-workers and big marriages between big families.

These intensive partnerships, this unbreakable communal cohesion, drives and demonstrates the purpose of mutual service that defines the people of our great State. Today, this unity is yet again showing its purpose and positive impacts on our small communities affected by recent environmental disasters.

Ted and I have known each other for years now, and the other stakeholders and partners involved in this initiative are all proven and passionate change-makers in rural development who we've both known personally and professionally for some time.

Getting in the room, stepping out of ourselves, and bringing ideas and open minds—and *open ARMS*—to the public arena, is how Vermonters get things done. And it's how we set ourselves apart. For my part, it's what makes me most proud to *be* a Vermonter.

We're grateful to you, Senator, for your enduring commitment to Rural Development, both in the general sense and to the agency I'm honored to work for. Your promotion and knowledge of our programs is unquestioned, and reflects your greater devotion to the place you love and the people who established their unique place among 49 beloved friends with self-determination and rugged independence tempered by neighborly generosity and a proactive sense of the common good.

The Green Mountain State is complex. Our placename alludes to the color of both economic and agricultural growth; and immovable resistance to a changing world opposed by the rock-solid leadership of those who anchor their efforts—and indeed, their lives—in acknowledging and addressing those changes.

For river-town communities in Vermont, this would be a difficult time to navigate economically *without* the element of a ruinous flood in play. Through a variety of programs, Governor Scott and VLCT and PTV and VCF and RD have worked together to make economic recovery possible, and make life-back-to-normal a sooner-than-later proposition for devastated rural communities—but we knew there was still a significant need for assistance.

Today's announcement now makes those dollars more accessible and more achievable for rural communities to secure. I am proud to work for the Biden-Harris Administration, which has always maintained an open mind—and open arms—to good ideas that address rural America's biggest challenges *creatively and collaboratively*.

By sharing resources, working together and engaging a common mission to rebuild our economic and community infrastructure with expert guidance from the ground up, we are engaging a unique opportunity that we hope will stand as a model for other states to follow.

[Handoff]