



**State of Vermont
Office of the Secretary of State**

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**Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Secretary of State
S. Lauren Hibbert, Deputy Secretary**

February 14, 2025

**To: Hon. Matthew Birong, Chair
House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs**

**From: Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Secretary of State
S. Lauren Hibbert, Deputy Secretary of State**

Re: Secretary of State Requests and Priorities for the "Big Bill"

Dear Matt,

Thank you in advance for advocating for the Secretary of State's budgetary needs in the Big Bill. Our requests fall into four buckets: Elections, Democracy Media Grants, positions and the creation of a n IT Capital Fund.

Election Support – \$450K: My office is asking for this amount because historically the General Assembly supports elections in even years (election years). In 2024, the fiscal support awarded was \$450K, we are asking for the same level of support this year.

Loss of Federal funding: In the initial stages of the legislative session, my office anticipated requesting an additional \$650K. In fact, we requested this in testimony before the House Appropriations Committee on February 5, 2026. That additional General Fund appropriation was needed because of the substantial change in federal funding our office is receiving. Because business filings revenue is more robust than we anticipated, we are formally withdrawing that request. We understand your committee has many competing priorities for our precious state resources. At this time, we are comfortable covering the loss in Federal funding within our existing revenue. Please remain mindful that the future of federal funding for elections is unclear, so it remains likely the Secretary of State's office will need to ask for additional GF in future years.

Democracy Media Grants: My office oversees three media grants that support civic engagement and Vermonter's ability to fully participate in their democracy. As you know, local media is important and one of the most effective ways for Vermonters to learn what is happening in their communities.

VAN base ask – \$1.8 M. This is the third year this grant would be administered by my office. In prior years, the money awarded went to 24 community media centers and provided vital support in the wake of the poll tax revenue.

VAN/Community Radio – \$90K. This is a new grant program that is built on the success of the VAN grant. Local, community radio is an essential part of many Vermonters' day. I have talked to the community radio community, and this modest request for support will go a long way toward continuing the strong tradition of community radio.

Local Journalism – \$50 K. This is the second year that my office has facilitated a grant that is matched by the Vermont Community Foundation. This grant program – the Local Civic Journalism Awards – is designed to steer state and philanthropic dollars to news outlets that inform Vermonters and foster civic engagement. This year, 16 outlets were awarded funds ranging from \$5,000 - \$10,000. The recipients represented a broad cross-section of local and regional news organizations, both nonprofit and for-profit, and mostly locally controlled. When we held our press conference celebrating these awards, awardees detailed how this small infusion of monies allowed them to invest in critical infrastructure for their outlets and news teams.

These Democracy Media Grants, for video, radio, and community media outlets, are important to support the “4th branch of American government,” our local Vermont press outlets, at a critical time when the journalism community is under fiscal strain.

Creation and Modification of Positions – No fiscal ask

Current limited services position (created in 2025) converted to full-time. This was the position we created last year in our municipal services division. My office never planned for this to be a limited services position. This role is important to responding promptly to Vermonters questions about local government, open meeting law, and the public records act. Additionally, this position is a critical asset to our office in responding to public records requests, which have increased in recent years due to the heightened focus on elections.

Two full-time positions:

A position in VSARA: This will be a full-time position within the Vermont State Records and Archives Records Administration. This position will be a Records Information Management position focused on implementing record management in agencies/departments.

A position in Business Services: This will be a full-time position within the Business Services Division. Currently a six-person team, it is clear that an additional person is required to maintain or improve our ability to assist Vermonter with opening and maintaining a business.

Creation of IT Capital Fund: No fiscal ask

The Secretary of State is currently looking to establish an IT Capital Fund. Information technology is now the “front door” of the Secretary of State’s Office, and IT projects have a limited lifecycle and are expensive. A one-year State Fiscal Year does not allow for appropriate budgeting for an IT build, which is generally multiple millions of dollars. This office intends to create an IT Capital Fund. This would allow for planning and budgeting for foreseeable IT builds, and funds would be available in the event of an IT emergency. If we have authorization to create this fund, we would ask the spending authority to start building that fund.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have on these requests. Thank you in advance for your support of my office and our work.



Sarah Copeland Hanzas
Secretary of State



S. Lauren Hibbert
Deputy Secretary of State