

CHAPTER 31. TOWN SERVICE OFFICER

Roles and Responsibilities

The town service officer is charged with assisting individuals within the town who require emergency food, fuel, or shelter. He or she is the municipal official who administers the “general assistance” program after normal business hours of the Vermont Economic Services Division. This program provides emergency financial assistance to help Vermont’s residents and those transients in the state who have nowhere else to turn and require support. The town service officer will provide support within program limits to assist a family or individual until the Vermont Economic Services Division office is next open. General assistance consists of financial aid for food, emergency temporary housing, clothing, transportation, electricity, fuel, and medical care.

- The town service officer receives applications for assistance, investigates to determine eligibility, grants funds advanced to him or her for emergency general assistance, and performs such other duties, including investigations, as the state commissioner of the Department for Children and Families may direct. 33 V.S.A. § 2102.
- When an individual contacts the service officer for assistance, the officer must determine if the individual is eligible, and then notify the district social welfare director of his or her findings. To obtain eligibility requirements, contact the Vermont Department for Children and Families Economic Services Division at 800-479-6151. However, if the officer believes that an individual who is applying for or receiving assistance came into the state for the purpose of receiving general assistance, the service officer may find that applicant or recipient ineligible. 33 V.S.A. § 2107.
- The town service officer may provide relief to an individual who may be homeless or who is transient, so long as that individual is not found in a home, hospital, or jail. 33 V.S.A. § 2112.
- If a person, including a transient, dies and no one comes forward to make funeral arrangements, whoever is in charge of that person must report the death to the nearest welfare officer or town service officer. 33 V.S.A. § 2111.

Appointment. On or before April 15 of each year, the selectboard must appoint a town service officer and notify the commissioner of the Department for Children and Families of the appointment. If no appointment is made, the commissioner may make the appointment for the town. It is not a conflict for a member of the selectboard to serve as town service officer or for an individual to serve in multiple towns. In the absence of a town service officer, a selectboard member may act on his or her behalf. Upon the retirement, removal, dismissal or death of a town service officer, the selectboard may immediately fill the vacancy and must notify the commissioner of the change. 33 V.S.A. § 2102(a).

Compensation. After appointment, the commissioner must give the town service officer a certificate of appointment. The state compensates the officer for his or her services in the town. 33 V.S.A. § 2102 (a).

Statutory Duties. The duties of the town service officer are to receive applications for assistance, to investigate, make determinations of eligibility for general assistance, grant from funds advanced to him or her for emergency general assistance, and to perform other duties, including investigations under the welfare code as the commissioner may direct. The town service officer must promptly notify the district welfare director of all determinations which he or she makes as to an applicant’s eligibility. 33 V.S.A. §§ 2102 (b), 2104(b).

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Training/ Assistance. The town service officer may call the Vermont Department for Children and Families Economic Services Division district office, 800-479-6151, to consult with an economic service staff person.

For more information or technical assistance, contact the VLCT Municipal Assistance Center, 800-649-7915, or the Vermont Department for Children and Families Economic Services Division district office, 800-479-6151.