



I am writing to express support for H.41, an act relating to the referral of domestic and sexual violence cases to community justice centers. I serve as the Director of the SafeSpace Anti-Violence Program at the Pride Center of Vermont. At SafeSpace, we work to transform harm with and for LGBTQ+ Vermonters. Through direct service advocacy, education, and community support, we provide comprehensive services to support LGBTQ+ survivors of hate, bias, harassment, discrimination, abuse, intimate partner violence, stalking, trafficking, sexual assault, and other interpersonal, systemic, and community harms.

The SafeSpace Anti-Violence Program at Pride Center of Vermont receives daily hotline calls from LGBTQ+ people who experience intimate partner violence (IPV), do not feel safe calling police, and like most survivors, do not want their partners involved with the criminal legal system; they just want the abuse to stop. We also receive calls from people who cause domestic or sexual violence (DV/SV) and want help interrupting their own abusive behavior. While providing restorative justice facilitation to people who cause abuse is currently beyond the scope of SafeSpace's work, the need is clear.

National research backs this up. LGBTQ+ individuals experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than the general population, and transgender people and bisexual women are at significantly greater risk of being sexually assaulted. These risks increase exponentially for people with identities that intersect with historically marginalized communities. LGBTQ+ individuals also face higher rates of poverty. All of these factors can make it challenging for LGBTQ+ survivors to report to police and other systems that haven't always offered needed protections. For example, according to [the Human Rights Campaign](#), "85 percent of victim advocates surveyed by the National Coalition of Anti Violence Programs reported having worked with an LGBTQ survivor who was denied services because of their sexual orientation or gender identity." Simply put, many LGBTQ+ survivors need options beyond what are currently available in Vermont's response systems.

I have been a domestic and sexual violence advocate at Steps to End Domestic Violence and the DIVAS Program at CRCF, and I have a keen eye for red flags and signs of DV and SV. Previous to working at SafeSpace, I was a restorative justice victim liaison at the Burlington Community Justice Center. Some cases that were referred to a restorative justice process at the Burlington CJC had a responsible party who, even though the case was not "about" domestic or sexual violence, was in fact a victim of, or responsible for causing, such violence. Upon reading case affidavits in preparation for an RJ process, I was one of the few CJC staff who saw these red flags and signs; because I had specific training as an SV/DV advocate, I saw that a charge for "disturbing the peace through electronic means" was actually stalking. I saw that the responsible party in a retail theft case was actually a victim of coercive control and intimate partner violence. These cases are already coming to CJCs, but without any support, guidance, or training from our state SV/DV agencies. By passing H.41, you are acknowledging and filling this

 SAFESPACE WORKS TO TRANSFORM HARM WITH AND FOR LGBTQ+ VERMONTERS 

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overlooked gap in our justice system and providing vital resources for survivors and CJC staff to access the support they need.

To me, this work is personal as well as professional. My mother was shot to death on New Year's Eve 2001 in San Bernardino, California as I was performing at a poetry slam here in Burlington. After a traumatizing and lengthy trial, the 19 year-old who murdered her was sentenced to 65 years-to-life in prison. In the summer of 2021, I participated in a brilliantly facilitated Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD) two years in the making. Twenty years after my mother was killed, I met with Hector, the man who took her life. Sitting across from him, I heard his story and shared mine. I asked the *why's* and *how's* that I had wondered for decades, and Hector answered with honesty and humility. I learned that he was undocumented and a victim of complex trauma. Our dialogue allowed me to heal and find meaning in senseless loss, and I now plan to advocate for Hector's parole in 2028 (which is only available because he was a youthful offender). While the VOD was beneficial to my heart, soul, and worldview, I dream of a world in which restorative processes are available earlier in our lives such that no one is impacted by the criminal legal system's violent response to a youth's fatal mistake. I also think of the multilayered oppressions within my own LGBTQ+ community that are rooted in minority stress, racism, bias, stigma, and hate. While my LGBTQ+ identity wasn't related to the crime that took my mother's life, my understanding of intersectional oppression in our dominant culture helps me see that Hector and I have more in common than this tragedy.

Opening up restorative justice processes to address sexual and domestic violence does require a process that is deliberative, informed, and thoughtful. The well-considered approach in H.41 ensures that any restorative process developed in a community justice center would be created in close collaboration with a member organization of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, like the SafeSpace program. It also requires that any restorative process address important elements that survivors cannot always rely on in criminal legal system processes, such as facilitators and other staff who are trained in trauma, sexual and domestic violence, and restorative practices.

As a practitioner and victim, I am grateful to have been part of the group that developed and created the approach outlined in H.41 and hope you will advance this important next step for Vermont's survivors.

Thank you,

Kim Jordan, MA ([she/her](#))

Director of the [SafeSpace Anti-Violence Program at Pride Center of Vermont](#)