

***COORDINATED JUSTICE REFORM ADVISORY COUNCIL***  
**ACT 40 (2023), SEC. 2**  
**[28 V.S.A. § 126 (E)]**

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**House Judiciary Committee**  
**January 26, 2024**

## Background

The Coordinated Justice Reform Advisory Council (“the “Council”) was created to establish a unified and collaborative State approach to support State and local community-based programs and services that are consistent with Vermont’s restorative justice policy pursuant to section 2a of Title 28. See 28 VSA §126(a).



## Background

The Council was directed to consult with State and local partners to use a data-driven approach that improves public safety, reduces correctional and criminal justice spending, and reinvests savings or redirects funding in strategies that foster desistance or decrease crime, delinquencies, and recidivism.



## Members

- Willa Farrell, Office of the Attorney General
- Hon. Thomas A. Zonay, Chief Superior Judge of the Vermont Superior Court (Chair)
- Nicholas Deml, DOC Commissioner
- Lindy Boudreau, DCF
- Jennifer Poehlmann, Executive Director of the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services



## Members

- Monica Weeber, Executive Director of the Vermont Statistical Analysis Center (Vicechair)
- Xusana Davis, Executive Director of the Office of Racial Equity
- Rep. Trevor Squirrel
- Sen. Richard Sears



## Council directed to:

(a) Recommend to the Commissioner of Corrections, on or before September 1st of each year, the appropriate allocation of not more than \$900,000.00 from the Justice Reinvestment II line item of the Department of Corrections' budget for the upcoming fiscal year to support community-based programs and services, related data collection and analysis capacity, and other initiatives.



## Council Directed to:

(b) On or before November 15, 2023, and annually thereafter, to submit recommendations pursuant to 28 V.S.A. § 126(c)(4) and (c)(5) to enumerated Legislative Committees, with directive that the recommendations made pursuant to (c)(4) be submitted in the form of proposed Legislation.



## **9/1/23 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- On September 1, 2023, the Council forwarded recommendations to the Commissioner of Corrections relating to the appropriate allocation of not more than \$900,000.00 from the Justice Reinvestment II line item of the Department of Corrections' budget for the upcoming fiscal year to support community-based programs and services, related data collection and analysis capacity, and other initiatives.





## Focus of Recommendations

- The Council's recommendations focused on the FY 24 budget of which there were unallocated funds in the amount of \$240,952, and the amount of \$250,000 which the Council understood the Legislature intended to be used to fund CJs.



## FY 2024 Allocation/Leg. Intent (B.338.1) - \$899,652

- \$108,700 to DCF to leverage Medicaid for BARJ
- \$300,000 for the Vermont Network
- \$490,952 for "other Justice Reinvestment II priorities including Community Justice Centers and Women's Reentry programs."



## Unallocated funds (\$240,952)

- The Council recommended that these funds be allocated to reentry services provided by community organizations following a procurement process, consistent with DOC and State practice.
- This was consistent with the Memorandum dated August 21, 2023, which the Vermont Network provided to the Council in support of its request for this allocation.



## CJC Funds (\$250,000) (over base allocations)

- The Council recommended that these funds be allocated to CJsCs to address a number of different initiatives, including but not limited to:
- Community-wide education to enhance Vermonters' understanding of the need for, and benefits of, restorative justice initiatives and programs in Vermont; and



## CJC funds (\$250,000) contd.

- The establishment of programs designed to address impediments to success for individuals involved in the criminal justice system (Examples would include, but not be limited to, assistance with reinstatement of driving privileges, as well as assistance in securing housing and employment.



## DOC Action on Recommendations

- RFP released in early December for Women's Recovery and Reentry Services
- Major emphasis on recovery, reentry, and stable, community-based sober housing
- Decision expected in February, 2024
- Grant start date expected to be March 1, 2024



# **11/8/23 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- On November 8, 2023, the Council forwarded its recommendations to the Legislature.
- The Council discussed options for creating a sustainable funding structure to support state and local community-based programs that further the goals of justice reinvestment and restorative justice practices.



- The discussions focused on programs that are supported by fines and fees, such as court diversion and programs that support crime victim services.
- The Council concluded that while such programs are integral to the criminal justice system there were issues with funding.





## Instability due to Funding Structure

- The Council identified that since these programs are supported through fines and fees which are not consistent, there is an instability in the programs related to employee retention and annual fluctuations in appropriations.
- This impacts the programs and the services which they can deliver.



## Addressing Funding Instability

- The Council recommended that the Legislature enact a Session Law (a proposal of which was submitted) directing the Joint Fiscal Office in collaboration with the Coordinated Justice Reform Advisory Council, and other stakeholders to examine:



## Addressing Funding Instability

- ... the fees and fines collected from state services which are used to support programs that improve public safety, reduce correctional and criminal justice spending, decrease crime, delinquencies, and recidivism, and support victims of crime.



## Intent of Proposed Session Law

- To determine which programs are supported by fees and fines so that the Council will have the necessary information to consider proposing legislation in the future that moves identified fines and fees to the general fund, moves program support from specials funds to general funds, and also establishes the base amount of general fund dollars needed to support the identified program.



# Questions?

