



VERMONT  
NETWORK

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**House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development**

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**Director of Economic Empowerment**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on H.92.

The Vermont Network is Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence in the state. We are the statewide domestic and sexual violence coalition, with 15 member organizations which provide support, advocacy and prevention education in every town in Vermont.

We support the intent of the domestic and sexual violence language included in H.92. As you heard last week, the state currently has a Transitional Employment benefit program for survivors of domestic and sexual violence who leave employment due to reasonable fear that the domestic and sexual violence will continue en route to or from the place of employment, intend to relocate in order to avoid future violence against the individual or a member of their family, a reasonable belief that leaving employment is necessary for the safety of themselves or a member of their family or a physical or emotional inability to work as a result of experiencing domestic or sexual violence.

As you have heard from the Department of Labor, the program is severely underutilized. This is not to be taken to mean that survivors don't need this benefit. Economic abuse is present in 99% of domestic violence cases. Impacting a survivor's employment is often a tactic that is used by the partner that causes harm to gain and maintain control. This takes the form of stalking their partner on their way to work, sabotaging transportation or childcare so they cannot get to work, showing up or calling the survivors' workplace repeatedly, etc. We also know that sexual violence, over a lifetime costs an individual over \$120,000, which includes lost wages. I don't believe this is a matter of survivors not needing wage replacement for leaving work related to the violence they have experienced; rather it is the barriers to accessing the current program which pose a significant challenge.

We know that when a survivor is fleeing an unsafe situation, this is a time when they are most vulnerable. It is crucial that they be able to access wage replacement as quickly as possible to be able to gain and maintain safety for themselves and their children. We have worked with the Department of Labor to try and create increased awareness around the program. We share the information with new advocates periodically in a one-pager with resources and, after meeting with the Department of Labor, they added some information about the Transitional Benefit program more prominently on some of their materials. Yet, many survivors still do not know that this is an option. Additionally, as you have heard, the current system sets up what is often a delay, or extra steps, for survivors to access this benefit. This program needs to be more accessible. Information needs to be more prominently featured in outreach materials - everyone



that applies for unemployment insurance should be made aware that the program exists and the flow into the program needs to be smoother.

Allowing survivors who are forced to leave their employment due to fleeing violence to access wage replacement through the traditional unemployment insurance benefits, as in H.92, would help to make this benefit more accessible to survivors. It would reduce barriers that currently exist that keep survivors from gaining this much needed economic benefit. There are pieces of the current Transitional Employment benefit program, such as its flexibility and the ability to use it when a survivor is unable to work due to violence, that are extremely valuable and warrant putting the effort into this program to make it stronger. We see that, with these changes, the two programs could complement one another.

It is the Vermont Network's mission to create a world where all people thrive, and we believe that any step we can take to creating more economic security for survivors supports that mission.

Thank you.