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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development  
Senate Committee on on Economic Development, Housing and General  
Affairs

**FROM:** Vermont Department of Labor

**DATE:** January 19, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Report on Utilization of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors'  
Transitional Employment Program

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Section 45 of Act 76 of 2023, *An act relating to child care, early education, workers' compensation, and unemployment insurance*, directs the Department of Labor to submit a report regarding the utilization of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors' Transitional Employment Program (Program). This memorandum is submitted on behalf of the Department of Labor (Department) in satisfaction of this requirement.

### PROGRAM UTILIZATION

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Ove the past 10 years, the Department of Labor has approved 13 claimants under the Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors' Transitional Employment Program. See below.

- 2013 – 4 claimants; \$19,148 in benefits paid
- 2014 – 0
- 2015 – 0
- 2016 – 1 claimant; \$5,252 in benefits paid
- 2017 – 3 claimants; \$10,770 in benefits paid
- 2018 – 0
- 2019 – 2 claimants; \$7,898 in benefits paid
- 2020 – 0
- 2021 – 0



- 2022 – 0
- 2023 – 3 claimants; \$10,961 in benefits paid

## SUMMARY OF EFFORTS TO IMPROVE AWARENESS

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Generally speaking, the Department does not take affirmative steps to increase awareness of unemployment insurance programs administered by the UI Division. As this is a State-run program and not within the regular UI system, the Department cannot utilize federal dollars in support of program costs, including staff time and outreach efforts.

The Department includes information about the Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors' Transitional Employment Program in the Department's UI Claimant Handbook and in 2019 the Department amended the mandatory employment poster to include specific language about the Program. This employment notice about UI is required to be posted "in a place conspicuous to individuals performing services for the employer."<sup>1</sup>

While the Department has always worked with the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (Vermont Network) on this Program, after discussions with the General Assembly in 2023, the Department collaborated with the Vermont Network on additional ways in which the Department can assist in increasing awareness. Specifically, Department staff joined the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence's June meeting to discuss the current state of the Program and gather feedback on ways to further improve Program awareness. At the recommendation of those at the Council, the Department has reached out to the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs to work with local officials to ensure their understanding of the support offered through this Program.

In addition, the Department made two changes to the processing of information regarding UI initial claims in efforts to better identify individuals earlier in the claims filing process who may be eligible for this Program. Specifically, in calendar year 2023 in collaboration with the House Commerce Committee, the Department began to ask claimants who are filing an initial claim whether their separation was due to a domestic or sexual violence circumstance. This alone has had a significant impact on the potential number of claimants as the Department has seen a number of individuals indicate yes. Lastly, the Department has developed a one-page

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<sup>1</sup> See 21 V.S.A. § 1346.



informational factsheet that will be mailed to each individual claimant informing them of the specific of the Program.

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION**

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At this time, after thorough review of the Program with Department staff, the Department of Labor is recommending elimination of a standalone Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors' Transitional Employment Program. Instead, the Department recommends amending eligibility for the regular UI Program to allow individuals who separate for a domestic or sexual violence circumstance to be eligible for regular UI benefits.

This will allow for numerous Program enhancements. Specifically, the Department can ensure that more individuals are covered due to a separation related to a domestic or sexual violence circumstance. Currently, the way the Program is statutorily written, the separation must be voluntary, and this has caused some instances whereby an individual claimant may not be eligible for regular UI or the Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors' Transitional Employment Program.

In addition to ensuring an expansion of protection by moving this to the regular UI program, a move will also allow for more administrative efficiencies by allowing these individuals to file in the regular UI program as opposed to needing to apply for a separate stand-alone benefits program. This will also allow the Department to utilize federal dollars for public awareness efforts and administration, which is currently prevented because the Program is not within the administration of the UI system.

Whether the Program remains a stand-alone or is made part of eligibility for regular UI benefits, the Department will continue to try and increase awareness for the Program. In particular, the Department will continue to work with the Vermont Network on areas of improvement. The Department will continue its work on ensuring information is made available through the Department's website and is provided to all claimants that apply for benefits. And the Department will continue to expand our network of partners, specifically by working through the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs on expanding those officials who are made aware of the Program's existence and support.

End of Report

