



23-0977 - An act relating to marriage license fees
House Judiciary Committee
March 14th, 2023

The Vermont Network strongly supports Committee bill 23-0977, which would allocate a portion of revenues from marriage license fees to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund, which is currently experiencing a projected \$350,000 deficit due to declining revenues.

Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund

The Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund was established in 2008, is set forth in 13 V.S.A. § 5360 and is administered by the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services. The fund serves as a primary revenue source for critically important services for victims, as well as systems which improve public responses to domestic and sexual violence.

The revenues for the Fund are currently comprised of a portion of two revenue sources:

- A \$47.00 surcharge on criminal and civil judgements. Of this surcharge:
 - \$10.00 goes to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund
 - \$29.75 goes to the Victims Compensation Fund
 - \$7.25 goes to the General Fund
- A \$60 marriage license fee. Of the marriage license fee:
 - \$35 goes to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund
 - \$10 is retained by the town of issuance
 - \$15 goes to the General Fund

This fund provides approximately \$900,000 annually to support the provision of statewide and local victim services. The revenues from the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund are used in the following ways:

- Almost half of the fund is passed through directly to local domestic and sexual violence organizations using a funding formula that accounts for variables such as population, geographic area served and services provided.
- Approximately \$90,000/year is distributed to Member Organizations as direct support for survivors and is used for immediate expenses such as housing, transportation or other basic needs services.
- Funding for Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services which provides services to victims of crime in Vermont who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind or Hard of Hearing.
- Funding for SafeSpace at the Pride Center of Vermont which is a statewide anti-violence program which provides advocacy services to victims of crime who are LGBTQ.
- Funding to support staffing for the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence.
- Funding to support the Vermont Network's statewide work to support local member organizations.
- Historically, the fund has also supported staffing costs for a domestic violence trainer at the Vermont Police Academy at the Vermont Criminal Justice Council. The Governor's Recommended budget moves this expense to the Vermont Criminal Justice Council's budget. We support this shift.



Joint Fiscal Office Recommendation

In 2022, the Joint Fiscal Office issued a report on the status of crime victim special funds and made recommendations for potential policy solutions¹. Those policy options include dedicating to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund:

- *A portion of the \$7.25 surcharge on criminal and civil judgements that currently goes to the General Fund.* This option was recommended by the Governor in the FY 24 budget, with associated language introduced in H.303. The proposal in H.303 would provide an additional \$3.50 to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund and the remainder provided to the Victims Compensation Special Fund.
- *The entirety of the \$15 general fund share of the marriage license fees.* This option is set forth in this Committee bill. If enacted, it would result in an approximate \$70,000 loss for the General Fund - a miniscule impact on the General Fund but an incredibly important impact on the health of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund.

Requests

Although this Committee bill addresses the marriage license fee, it is one part of a multi-pronged strategy to address the financial health of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund and preserve its core purpose – services for victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. To accomplish this, both sources of revenue to the fund - the surcharge on judgements and the marriage license fee - must be addressed.

- Dedicate \$15 (the General Fund portion) of the marriage license fee to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund.
- Dedicate \$7.25 (the general fund portion) of the surcharge to be split between the Victims Compensation Fund and the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund (per H.303).

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ [2022 Joint Fiscal Office Report](#)