

**Access to Justice and Budgetary Needs**  
**House Judiciary**  
**February 16, 2024**

For the record, my name is Rachel Jolly and I lead the Burlington Community Justice Center. Thank you for the time and attention you're putting into multiple aspects of the justice system, increasing geographic justice and the examination of the resources needed to create meaningful reforms. We've been hearing much testimony over the past few weeks about the court backlog and a growing interest in relying on restorative justice programs to help alleviate that.

As testimonies about H645 made more clear, the current funding system of our 23 community-based restorative justice centers can be confusing, as four primary funders allocate state dollars to different subsets of those 23. I'd like to highlight the need for FY25 increases to provide community-based restorative interventions for both victims/survivors of harm and crime as well as those who have caused the harm. In addition, as Representative Rachelson mentioned earlier today, a critical offering of many of our services, is connecting people to treatment and other service providers that directly address underlying causal factors for their crimes.

My first strong request is that the Legislature consider placing specific line items for the programs/services they want to support in all four of the primary funders budgets: DCF (BARJ), AGO (Court Diversion and Pretrial Services), DOC (in FY25, to include pre-charge and reparative panels, reentry services, and community referrals) and the VCCVS (victim services in RJs). This approach would increase transparency and clarity for everyone.

The Department for Children and Families currently supports 12 providers in offering restorative programming for court adjudicated youth or those at risk of being so. The programs were level-funded for many, many years, but thankfully, thanks to the part of several legislators including Senator Kitchel, we have received two \$250K increases in the last two years, as part of a \$1M increase over the course of four years. FY25 will be year three, and thus, we request the next \$250K increase to those providers, as well as \$108,700 from the \$900K JRI monies, for a total of \$358,700.

The Governor's budget has included a 3% increase in the AGO Court Diversion budget (totaling about \$3M) and the AGO has also requested approximately \$300K additional to support four centers whose caseloads have been especially high and who need to increase capacity to meet that demand. The VT Association of Court Diversion Programs fully supports that request.

For the 17 centers who provide services funded by the VT Dept. of Corrections, we are requesting a 10% increase over our FY24 grants (which totaled about \$3.5M) for a total of about \$4M for COLA, other operating expenses, and an increase in victim services. We have been reminded by the DOC that currently we are facing an almost \$600K cut from our FY24 levels, so as you can imagine, this would of course, necessitate staffing and services cuts at a time when the centers will need to be relied on even more.

Funding for the CJs through DOC currently resides in Sec. B.338.1 of the budget (entitled Justice Reinvestment). Despite the title of this section, only a very small percentage of these funds are for Justice Reinvestment. The majority of the funds in this section support transitional housing and CJs. Therefore,

in addition to a funding request, we are requesting that this section be divided into three sections to more accurately reflect the purpose of the sections, as well as to create greater transparency in the budget.

Lastly, the Center for Crime Victim Services is the fourth primary funder I referenced, and the one who has had the least capacity to support the state-wide infrastructure of restorative services. Currently, the CCVS can only support six of our 23 centers, primarily from VOCA funds. As you just heard from Sarah, those funds are at risk in FY26, and so my purpose in bringing this up now is to echo Sarah's call for a conversation at a later date that more adequately funds services whose sole focus is on victims' rights and needs, as well as address the obvious geographic justice disparity need.

Thank you for your time and attention.