



S. 190 – An act relating to statements made by a child victim of an offense involving serious bodily injury

Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director

January 16, 2024

Thank you for the invitation to speak with the committee about S. 190, an act relating to statements made by a child victim of an offense involving serious bodily injury. On behalf of our Member Organizations and the victims and survivors we represent, the Vermont Network supports S. 190 and we hope to see this bill move through the legislative process this year.

S. 190 is a needed update to Vermont’s statutes regarding how the legal system responds to abuse of children. This bill extends the protections that are currently provided to victims of child sexual abuse to children who are victims of physical abuse causing serious bodily injury. These same protections have been provided to victims of child sexual abuse for over 15 years and work well. The Vermont Network believes that it makes sense from a policy perspective to ensure that equivalent protections are available to these child victims.

We know more now than we used to about trauma and the impact of trauma on the brain – especially developing brains – than we used to know and we know that child abuse and domestic violence in a home can have significant impacts on children and youth. This change will help ensure that these same, age-appropriate protections are extended to children who experience serious bodily injury – including child survivors of domestic violence. While the justice system can provide needed protection for victims of child abuse, involvement in the legal system itself is also often traumatic. The goal of the legal system, despite the wishes of advocates, is not the healing of victims of crime.

This change, to include children who are victim of serious bodily injury is one step towards a more trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate legal response to child harm.

The Network supports this proposal and looks forward to engaging with this committee and other stakeholders as this bill moves forward.