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To: Mental Health Oversight Committee
From: Nick Emlen, Mental Health Systems Coordinator
Subject: Designated Agency Crisis Services Worker Safety
Date: October 31, 2013

NRE

In August your Committee received information from Joyce Dion representing the UNAP about the need for legislation to address concerns about worker safety for human services outreach and crisis workers.

The Vermont Council Emergency Services do generally respond to crisis with single staff. However, when safety risk factors are identified, crisis staff collaborate with local law enforcement. Safe response protocols guide these decisions; staff apply common sense measures to assess the safety of a situation before responding in person to a call. No one is expected to do something that they don't feel safe doing. There are no service quotas.

Of course working in teams would be ideal, but current funding levels for crisis services do not allow for this. In fact, staff recruitment and retention is difficult due to low staff compensation.

While the testimony offered by UNAP does not accurately describe Designated Agency crisis teams, it may be more relevant to Department of Children & Family intensive family based services staff who sometimes must provide a mandated intervention that is specific to the work of DCF.

An overview of the range of our operations and policies in Emergency Services can be found in the attached Vermont Statewide System of Care Plan for Adult Mental Health, pages 51 through 55.

The Council would be glad to provide more information as requested by your Committee.