

## Child Protection Committee

### MDTs & SIUs

**Summary:** MDTs are empanelled by DCF to assist DCF offices, but do not directly undertake criminal investigations. Contrary to some testimony the Committee heard, SIUs are authorized to investigate child physical abuse as well as sexual crimes against both children and adults. However, there is variation in how SIUs are organized and as to what crimes they investigate.

#### **Current Law:**

**A. Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs):** 33 V.S.A. § 4917(a) authorizes DCF to empanel these teams; DCF “shall appoint members” trained and engaged in work relating to child abuse or neglect including medicine, mental health, social work, nursing, child care, education, law, and law enforcement. The teams must include a DOC representative. MDTs functions are limited to “assist[ing]” DCF District Offices “in identifying and treating child abuse or neglect cases” by providing:

- (1) case diagnosis or identification;
- (2) a comprehensive treatment plan; and
- (3) coordination of services pursuant to the treatment plan.

MDTs may also provide public informational and educational services to the community about identification, treatment, and prevention of child abuse and neglect and “foster communication and cooperation among professionals and organizations in its community.” 33 V.S.A. § 4918(b). Therefore, the MDTs do not have an investigative function.

**B. Special Investigation Units (SIUs):** 24 V.S.A. § 1940 sets forth how SIUs are set up and governed and states that the Dept. of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs shall coordinate efforts to provide access to units in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, investigative agencies, victims’ advocates, and social service providers.

The mission of these units is defined in 24 V.S.A. § 1940(a) as investigating “sex crimes, child abuse, domestic violence, or crimes against those with physical or developmental disabilities.” However, § 1940(c) states that SIUs can also investigate “elder abuse.” Therefore, while there is a discrepancy between the two sub-sections, SIUs are statutorily authorized to investigate not only child abuse and sex crimes, but domestic violence and crimes against the disabled and elderly. SIUs are also responsible for investigating violations of sex offender registry requirements. 13 V.S.A. § 5415.

**Issues and Committee Options:** The Committee heard testimony that SIUs cannot investigate child physical abuse cases. This is incorrect, but it appears that there is confusion as to what sorts of cases SIUs could investigate. The Committee also heard testimony regarding the supervision of SIU staff, variations in how SIUs are organized and run, and in the cases they accept. If the Committee wishes to address these issues, it could limit or expand the crimes SIUs can, or must, investigate. The Committee could also address the lack of consistency in organization and mission.