

## Vermont Council on Domestic Violence

**To:** Rep. Mitzi Johnson, Chair  
Rep. Peter J. Fagan, Vice-Chair  
House Appropriations Committee Members

**From:** Heather Holter, Coordinator, Vermont Council on Domestic Violence  
**Re:** Budget Adjustment Request \$77,000 for Domestic Violence Accountability Programming (DVAP)  
**Date:** 1/13/16

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you about the critical need for state funding for Domestic Violence Accountability Programming in Vermont.

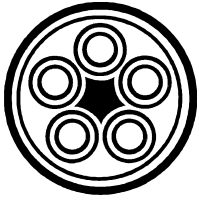
As you may know, the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence (Council) was created as the Governor's Council on Domestic Violence in 1993 by then Governor Howard Dean, and Chief Justice Frederic W. Allen. The Council was conceived as a statewide coordinated community response team, with broad representation from the Judiciary, the State, law enforcement, and statewide stakeholders invested in addressing systemic obstacles to victim safety and offender accountability. In 2008, the Vermont Legislature recreated the Vermont Council with statutory duties which include :

- Making recommendations for changes in state programs, laws, administrative regulations, policies, and budgets related to domestic violence.
- Developing recommendations for appropriate programming options for domestic violence offenders.
- Maintaining standards for intervention programs for perpetrators of domestic violence, and certifying that programs are complying with the standards.

Today I am here to urge you to allocate \$77,000 for the remainder of the fiscal year in order to ensure that the Domestic Violence Accountability Programs we have worked so hard to establish, will endure.

Currently, there are 8 certified programs and 2 programs in the process of becoming certified, providing services to offenders in 11 counties in Vermont. As you have heard from Auburn Watersong of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, we lost six sites last year when our largest provider discontinued offering DVAP programming. However, local task forces came together, prosecutors and department of corrections staff spoke up, experienced facilitators came forward, and since June, six new programs or locations have been created to respond to the fundamental need for community-based domestic violence accountability programming.

These programs are small, so it won't take much to sustain them—but without sustainable funding—starting now, and continuing next year, and the year after, these programs will not be able to keep offering groups for domestic violence offenders.



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Last year, 350 offenders enrolled in domestic violence accountability programs in Vermont. This number is an increase over 2014, even with the loss of our biggest provider as of May 31, 2015. It may be helpful to compare this to the overall number of misdemeanor domestic assault charges in 2014—there were 506. Offenders enrolled in Domestic Violence Accountability programs may end up there as a result of other charges, so there is not an exact relationship between those numbers, but it may provide helpful perspective.<sup>1</sup>

The Council oversees the training and certification for Vermont's Domestic Violence Accountability Programs, through a part-time Domestic Violence Accountability Coordinator and a committee of the Council. Local domestic and sexual violence task forces participate in certification and biennial re-certification of their local program. Council members are deeply invested in the quality of this vital programming for low to medium risk domestic violence offenders, because we know what a powerful opportunity for change they represent.

Community based DVAPs are one of a continuum of accountability measures, and one that must endure as an option for first time and lower level offenders in order that those who perpetrate domestic violence are given an opportunity to change as a result of early intervention by the criminal justice system. This is the fundamental role of accountability—intervention, victim safety, a chance for offenders to understand the impact of their abuse, and learn how to replace tactics of coercive control with respect and nonviolence.

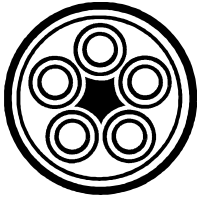
It is important to note that the Council and its statewide partners have been working closely with the Department of Corrections to support the development of domestic violence specific risk assessment to ensure that appropriate supervision of and programming for domestic violence offenders.

In December of 2014, the Council formalized the recommendations contained in a report prepared by the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and the Center for Court Innovation entitled "*Domestic Violence Accountability in Vermont*". One of the most crucial recommendations relates to the continued development of a differential response to offenders based on risk assessment. In fact, Vermont is well-situated to identify those offenders who would most benefit from programming, since the Department is poised to implement the DVSI-R (Domestic Violence Severity Instrument-Revised) a tool which will allow trained staff to more accurately assess which response from the criminal justice system will effectively hold the offender accountable, and ensure victim safety.

Victims and communities are safer when offenders participate in appropriate programming, are afforded tools for change, and are held accountable.

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<sup>1</sup> State of Vermont Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission Report 2015



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