

Memo

To: House Government Operations Committee
From: Michael Desrochers, Division of Fire Safety
Date: March 11, 2015
Re: H. 348

The Robert H. Wood Criminal Justice and Fire Service Training Center in Pittsford is currently the primary training location for Vermont's law enforcement officers and fire fighters. The aging facility is becoming increasingly in need of repair and renovation. For a number of years funding for renovations have been sought through the Capital Construction budget and denied based on a perception that the entities located in Pittsford did not cooperatively utilize the facility. In the 2013 Legislative session, the Department of Building and General Services was appropriated funding to hire a third party consultant to develop an operational governance and planning model for the operation, financial integrity and maintenance of the Robert H. Wood Criminal Justice and Fire Service Training Center. Berkshire Advisors, Inc. was contracted and the selected Steering Committee reviewed the findings and recommendations and all signed study (previously submitted electronically to this Committee).

Berkshire's study explains that although conflicts between the Criminal Justice and the Fire Service Training Councils are infrequent, when they do arise they are not easily solved. Other issues such as the need for long-term planning, increased reporting and maximizing utilization were also identified. To address these challenges Berkshire proposed to create a new governance structure consisting of a balanced group representing both the Fire and Law Enforcement training academies. In addition, a new administrator position and incentive structure were also recommended.

H. 348 takes into consideration the proposals outlined in the study and if passed, will charge the new committee to govern the access, use and capital investments at the Robert H. Wood Criminal Justice and Fire Service Training Center. Primary users at the campus have collaboratively reviewed the bill as introduced and support the overall mission but do have concerns regarding the members on the Committee. The Steering Committee would like to see the membership be composed of the following eight members:

- (1) the Executive Directors of the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council;
- (2) the Chair of the Vermont Fire Service Training Council
- (3) an employee of the Department of Buildings and General Services, appointed by the Commissioner of the Department;
- (4) the Chair of the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council;
- (5) the Chief Training Officer of the Vermont Fire Academy;

(6) an employee of the Department of Corrections, appointed by the Commissioner of the Department;

(7) the Director of the Division of Fire Safety;

(8) a member of the State Police, appointed by the Commissioner of Public Safety.

Another very significant concern of the Steering Committee is the proposed language does not identify a position to carry-out the duties set forth. Although an informal committee (VCJTC Building & Grounds sub-committee) has already begun to work through some of the challenges identified, to monitor effectiveness, conduct performance analysis and manage budget and rates a position must be dedicated to doing so. Without incorporating the recommended “strong administrator” a successful plan will be much harder to achieve.

Overall, H.348 is placing the Robert H. Wood Criminal Justice and Fire Service Training Center on the right path to more effectively address the many present and future challenges that are facing the users in Pittsford. With some changes outlined above, the various stake holders are very much in support of the creation of the new Committee.