March 25, 2015

TO: Rep. Maxine Grad, Chair
        Re. Willem Jewett, Vice-Chair
        House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy
RE: S.13

Thank you for inviting the Network to comment on S.13 which proposes a number of changes intended to improve the efficiency and consistency of the Vermont Sex Offender Registry. The Network recognizes and appreciates that the Vermont legislature has taken one of the most thoughtful approaches to creating a sex offender registry of any state in the nation.

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence wishes to express support for this proposed bill. Sex offender registries are a part of Vermont's comprehensive effort to eradicate sexual violence, which includes a full spectrum of services and systems focusing on prevention, community education, resources and support for victims/survivors, quality investigations, timely and effective prosecution, incarceration, and offender supervision.

Efforts to identify sex offenders through a registry must always take care to prevent the possibility of revealing victim information. The Network recognizes the efforts of the Vermont Department of Public Safety to ensure that victim information is protected in our sex offender registry.

While it is clear that no sex offender registry can absolutely guarantee victim safety, we believe that it remains one useful tool for law enforcement agencies in their identification and tracking of convicted high risk sex offenders. It is therefore critically important that the Vermont Sex Offender Registry work well and that it contain reliable information that is accessible and usable for the general public.

By moving the responsibility for the sex offender registry process from VCIC to the court system, Vermont is taking another step toward ensuring its most effective use. S.13 clearly defines the criteria the court shall consider when determining whether sex offender registry requirements apply to the offender. The Network supports the legislature's efforts to decrease the critical error rate to 0% in hopes of making this the most effective tool possible.

Thank you.