

House Judiciary Committee

Fee Bill – Marriage License Fee

Testimony from Judy Rex, Executive Director, VT Center for Crime Victim Services

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In 2008, the legislature passed S.357, an omnibus domestic violence bill which became Act 174. This bill did many things, but two key pieces of the bill was to: 1) fund domestic violence prevention programs and services in order to break the inter-generation cycle of domestic violence and to support victims of domestic and sexual violence and 2) fund a Domestic Violence Training Coordinator at the VT Police Academy. To raise revenue for these initiatives, the bill added \$10 to the surcharge on criminal and civil fines and \$20 to the marriage license fee.

Originally, these fee increases were deposited into the Victim Compensation Special Fund. But, because the Center had to track these two revenue streams manually, the legislature created another special fund called the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund in 2013 and had these revenues deposited directly into its own special fund. Since FY 2009, the Center has funded the VT Network \$806,195 for prevention programs and economic and legal supports for victims of domestic and sexual violence. In 2009, funding for the DV Trainer position at the Academy was \$76,805 and increase every year because it was a state position. In 2015, funding for the position was reduced to half-time due to pressures on the special fund and because the position had other training duties at the Academy not related to domestic violence. Currently, the Center pays \$51,574 toward that position.

The cost of these two initiatives total \$857,769, but the revenue to the special fund falls short of this appropriation. In FY 2013, the fund brought in \$801,776, in FY 2014 \$836,562 and in FY 2015 \$792,719.

Due to positive fund balances in prior years, the Center was able to level fund these initiatives. However, by the end of FY 2016, there will be a fund deficit of \$64,449. For this reason, the Center requested a \$15 fee increase to the marriage license fee. Based on the average number of marriage licenses issued by the state for the period 2010-2015, a \$15 increase should bring in \$80,760 in additional revenue.

Vermont's current marriage license fee is \$45 and a \$15 increase will bring it to \$60. Marriage license fees tend to be higher in low population rural states. For example Kansas is \$85, North Dakota is \$65 and Arkansas is \$60. New Hampshire is \$50.