



January 13, 2016

TO: Rep. Mitzi Johnson, Chair
Rep. Peter J. Fagan, Vice-Chair
House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy

RE: Budget Adjustment Request - \$77,000 for Domestic Violence Accountability Programming (DVAP)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the need for funding to sustain domestic violence accountability programming in Vermont. Formerly known as “Batterer Intervention Programs”, these are the community-based weekly or bi-weekly co-facilitated group learning experiences which seek to change the criminal thinking and coercive control that is practiced by domestic violence offenders. An offender need not be charged with any crime, but the wide majority of these offenders are court-ordered to attend.

In the life of these programs, we are at a critical moment in time.

At the Network, we fundamentally believe in an offender’s ability to change. We know that when offenders succeed in making significant, successful, lifelong change, their partners, their children, and their communities benefit as well. While many victims rely on the criminal justice system – especially the courts – to provide safety, the system for providing accountability to offenders has undergone significant changes in Vermont. In 2013, the Vermont Department of Corrections modified all programming in correctional institutions effectively ending in house corrections-based programming focused specifically on domestic violence. Then in 2014, the statewide appropriation that had traditionally supported community-based DVAPs was also eliminated. Less than a year later, the state’s largest DVAP provider (Spectrum), serving 6 of Vermont’s 14 counties, closed their program. As of the end of June 2015, these programs no longer benefit from any designated funding, numerous programs closed over the summer, and many others are simply struggling to continue.

I am here today to ask that you allocate \$77,000 for the remainder of this fiscal year so that those programs currently running and forming (in 13 counties across Vermont) are able to continue to provide the quality programming that Vermont’s statewide standards require.

Each of these programs is facilitated by two co-facilitators. The majority of the programs currently charge offenders on a sliding scale rate, beginning at \$25 per person. All monies collected need to cover facilitators’ preparation time, training and professional development,

expenses, and facilitation time. It is worth noting as well that 3 of the current active programs rely, at least partially, upon group Medicaid rate reimbursements, so these groups will be experiencing an added financial challenge.

Despite the critical nature of this moment, the Network and our numerous collaborative partners have collectively recognized this as an opportunity to build a better system. The envisioned programming will be more responsive to individual needs, will allow for a greater likelihood of success, and when successful, will reduce recidivism and decrease the costly necessity for incarceration remedies. This budget adjustment funding – coupled with continued additional sustainable funding beginning in SFY 2016 - will ensure evidence-based accountability programming based upon skilled risk-assessment. Such programming will amount to statewide savings of expenses which would have been spent elsewhere in the system.

The Specifics of Our Budget Adjustment Request

Domestic Violence Accountability Coordinator (DVAC) \$39,500

Comments – The DVAC has been funded by the Department of Corrections for two years. The DVAC is responsible for all aspects of implementing the certification process for Domestic Violence Accountability Programs, communicating with the DV Council, providing information and support to the DOC Domestic Violence Advisory Group (DVAG) and providing training and technical assistance to all community-based Batterers Accountability Programs. This funding would allow the DVAC **to provide more intensive technical assistance to sites who are newly certified (a total of 6 programs)**, create **regional training** opportunities for programs, and work with statewide agencies to ensure implementation of evidence-based best practices in offender accountability.

Community Based Domestic Violence Accountability Allocation \$32,500

Comments – This allocation provides funding needed by community-based DVAPs **to secure certification under the Standards, including attending required training, updating materials, providing for co-facilitation of groups and administrative costs.** Funds are distributed to community-based DVAPs using a funding formula devised by and implemented by the DVAPs.

Training Community-Based Domestic Violence Accountability Programs \$5,000

Comments – **DVAPs are required to access up-to-date and relevant training in order to maintain certification.** These funds would be allocated to DVAPs to provide access to these trainings, including potential training on one of the nation’s cutting-edge evidence-based domestic violence accountability curricula.

I look forward to discussing our vision and longer-term plans for the future of community-based domestic violence accountability programming in the coming year’s budgeting process. Thank you for your time and consideration.