

Talking Points on Work Place Safety- Trissie Casanova

My Name is _____ I have been a social worker for X number of years and I currently work in the St Albans District Office for DCF Family Services

Point #1 – I am speaking from my experience as a social worker in DCF, I am representing my own views. Since August, because of the tragic murder of Lara Sobel, a great deal of attention has been rightly focused on DCF Family Services. I want to stress that this focus is needed but safety is a concern that is ever present across all agencies of state government. This tragedy has put a spotlight on safety concerns that state employees have and which they are no longer willing to accept.

- DCF has 12 district offices, 3 have some security, and 2 of those are as a result of the location of the office in a building that also houses a court. When we ask BGS for an explanation of why these 3 offices and not the others who do the exact same work and have the exact same threats, the response is that they do not know. We believe nearly 5 months since Lara's murder, this is not acceptable.
- We believe all 12 offices need a trained law enforcement officer on site in order to deescalate clients who are likely to become violent, to arrest those who do and to call for back up from other trained law enforcement officers.
- Today, I will speak from my experience at DCF, but VSEA has a survey of all of its members underway and can provide you with the result of that survey when the results are back.
- I will be sharing with you the results of the VSEA's survey of over 200 of my colleagues in Family Services who responded to a survey sent by the Labor management Committee that I also serve on. I want to say that we have been working collaboratively with the Deputy Commissioner Cindy Walcott and her team on this committee and we hope to continue to have these discussions at the labor management table in the future.

Point # 2-

- Staffing is a safety issue- to bring Vermont into compliance with nationally recognized standard of 12-15 children per worker; we need 53 additional social workers, at an investment of around in \$2.7 million dollars in addition to the Governor's proposal. We support the Governor's proposal but we on the frontline know it doesn't go far enough to insure the safety of our children and the workers who care for them. The survey indicates an overwhelming response of 95% of social workers believe that high caseloads are detrimental to staff safety.

Explain why staffing is a security issue: Ability to go in teams, ability to research the potential safety issues, ability to establish strong relationships and the ability to pay enough attention to the family that we prevent anger and resentment toward workers. (add other)

- The survey indicates some important points that I wish to emphasize:

Question #2- Workers do not feel adequately informed when there is a potential security issue. The sharing of information that workers can use to assess their safety is not being shared with front line workers- Cite the Barre example of Desiree Herring.

Question #8- 50 % of the respondents does not feel safe in their offices

Question #9- 63% do not feel safe in the area around their offices; this is generally interpreted to mean parking lots. – This is something we warned the Administration about long before Lara’s murder- we need secure and safe parking lots

Question # 15- 56% of DCF Family Service employees reported having been threatened. It has been reported that Since August DCF has reported around 100 additional threats

- Finally, I want to emphasize the need for additional law enforcement officers who are available to accompany social workers into situations where they feel unsafe. We seek to have police force that is under the control of the State of Vermont, either in the State Police or set up like the Capital Police that protect this building. NJ has a Human Services Police Department dedicated and trained for the needs of the Agency of Human Services.

Thank you for listening to my testimony, I am happy to respond to any questions you may have for me