

2015 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

PRESERVE AND PROMOTE FUNDING for victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence and the Network's Member Programs.

SUPPORT THE EARNED SICK AND SAFE DAYS BILL to ensure that all employees in Vermont have access to a minimum number of hours of earned time off in order to take care of their health and safety.

SUPPORT EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND CHECKS for all firearm sales in Vermont.

SUPPORT EFFORTS TO PROTECT CHILDREN

(see also the Network's 9/23/14 [memo to the Committee on Child Protection](#))

- Amend the rules of evidence and statutes to provide the same protections to child victims of physical violence that are currently provided to child victims of sexual violence in court processes.
- Address gaps in Human Services Board child abuse substantiation appeals process that allow victims to be cross-examined by perpetrators and re-victimized with no rights, standing or formal access to supports.
- Clarify the protection order statutes to make sure that minors can apply for protection orders with a "next friend" adult (who doesn't have to be a parent or guardian).
- Create a process for certification (through the Council on Domestic Violence) and funding for supervised visitation programs.
- Expand use of the Safe and Together Model of intervention for child protection in circumstances involving domestic violence.

- Provide funding for comprehensive domestic violence intervention programming in the community, including expansion of parenting programs for perpetrators of domestic violence, following recommendations from the Network and Center for Court Innovation report “Domestic Violence Accountability in Vermont”.
- Based on concern for children’s well-being and the safety of victims of domestic and sexual violence, oppose legislation that would:
 - mandate judges to order joint parental rights and responsibilities even when parents can’t agree on shared custody of children, or
 - create a felony crime of child neglect to apply to parents who “allow” serious injury to happen to a child.
- Fix the sexual assault statute to clarify that when both parties are under age 16 and the sexual act was consensual (did not involve force or coercion) then neither party can be charged with statutory sexual assault (based solely on age). This would bring the statute in line with existing case law.
- Support creation of an Office of Child Advocate, modeled on Vermont’s long-term care ombudsman, to provide independent oversight of DCF and other systems responsible for child protection.