



April 5, 2016

TO: Sen. Jane Kitchel, Chair
Sen. Alice Nitka, Vice-Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee

FROM: Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy

RE: Budget Request - \$200,000 for DV Accountability Programming

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 those who abuse their partners. An offender need not be charged with any crime, but the wide majority of these offenders are court ordered to attend.

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. Without sustainable funding in the coming fiscal year many, if not all, of these programs will close. While many victims rely on the criminal justice system – especially the courts – to provide safety, the system for providing accountability to offenders has recently undergone significant changes in funding 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 domestic violence accountability programs was also eliminated. Less than a year later, the state’s largest Domestic Violence Accountability Program provider (Spectrum), serving 6 of Vermont’s 14 counties, closed their program.

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. Community based DVAPs are one of a continuum of accountability measures. It is one option that must endure especially for first time and lower level offenders in order that those who perpetrate domestic violence are given that opportunity to change. This is early intervention by the criminal justice system – and an alternative to future incarceration and expense. This is the fundamental role of accountability—intervention, victim safety, a chance for offenders to understand the impact of their abuse, and learn how to replace tactics of coercive control with respect and nonviolence.

Last year, 350 offenders enrolled in domestic violence accountability programs in Vermont. This number is an increase over 2014 (320), even with the loss of our biggest provider as of May 31, 2015.

I am here today to ask that you allocate \$200,000 for the coming fiscal year so that those programs currently running and forming (10 across Vermont) are able to continue to provide the quality programming that Vermont’s statewide standards require. The Governor’s Council on Domestic Violence oversees the training and certification for Vermont’s Domestic Violence Accountability Programs, through a part-time Domestic Violence Accountability Coordinator and a committee of the Council. Local domestic and sexual violence task forces participate in certification and biennial re-certification of their local program. Council members are deeply invested in the quality of this vital programming for low to medium risk domestic violence offenders, because we know what a powerful opportunity for change they represent.

Each of these programs are 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.

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 going forward. This funding will ensure evidence-based accountability programming based upon skilled risk-assessment. **Such programming will amount to statewide savings overall in expenses spent elsewhere in the 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 incarcerative remedies.**



**Vermont Domestic Violence
Accountability**
Budget Request – FY 2017

Phase I

Domestic Violence Accountability Coordinator (DVAC) \$79,000

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 Batterers Accountability Programs, communicating with the DV Council, providing information and support to the DOC Domestic Violence Advisory Group (DVAC) and providing training and technical assistance to all community-based Batterers Accountability Programs.

Community Based Batterers Accountability Allocation \$75,000

This allocations provides funding needed by community-based Domestic Violence Accountability Programs 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 Domestic Violence Accountability Programs using a funding formula devised by and implemented by the DVAP's.

Pilot Projects \$36,000

The DV Council seeks to fund two pilot projects which will develop prototype systems that include using risk assessments to place batterers in interventions based on risk, using an evidence-based curriculum, possible model based on COSA for high risk offenders, and introducing a parenting curriculum into the groups.

Training Community Based DV Accountability Programs (DVAP) \$10,000

Comments – DVAP's are required to access up-to-date and relevant training in order to maintain certification. These funds would be allocated to DVAP's to provide access to these trainings.

Total FY 2017 Budget Request \$200,000

Phase II – FY 2018 and Going Forward

- DV Accountability Coordinator
- Expand Risk-Based, Multi-Track Programming Statewide
- Pilot Culturally Specific Program
- Pilot Gender Specific Program
- Pilot Restorative Justice Program