



January 21, 2016

TO: Sen. Jeanette White, Chair
Sen. Anthony Pollina, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Government Operations
FROM: Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy
RE: S.221 – an act related to law enforcement officers

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S.221. I would like to take this moment to thank the law enforcement community for all that they do every day to help protect victims of domestic and sexual violence and stalking. We appreciate their deep and demonstrated commitment to victims and to our member programs who support them.

The Network is the statewide coalition of 14 member programs who serve survivors of domestic and sexual violence and stalking throughout Vermont. For decades, the Network and its member programs have worked collaboratively with local and state law enforcement entities to ensure the creation of policies and practices that protect the safety of Vermont's victims.

I would like to request that Section 14 of S.221, which outlines the membership of the Law Enforcement Advisory Board (LEAB), to include a designated member from the Vermont Network. To date, ***the full Law Enforcement Advisory Board does not include any victim representation, nor does the current LEAB include any lay people unaffiliated with law enforcement, defense, or prosecution.***

Despite our long standing and positive relationship with law enforcement locally and statewide, the Network has not held a formal designated seat on the LEAB. Members of the LEAB have invited Network representation to the table periodically and we have appreciated the spirit of collaboration and the ability to participate as a consulting guest.

Our member programs participate in local domestic and sexual violence task forces with area law enforcement to ensure that all local law enforcement, judicial and support systems include the victim's voice, even when the victim is not present to speak. Likewise the Governor's Council on Domestic Violence includes numerous victim advocates as well as representatives from local and state law enforcement working together with numerous others to build statewide systems that support the needs of victims and hold perpetrators accountable. In all of these multidisciplinary settings, there must be a voice at the table which represents those most affected by violence.

The Network is currently a member of Stop the Violence VT, a group formed by Vermont's law enforcement leaders to raise awareness about gender-based violence; promote the adoption of best-practice policies within all of Vermont's law enforcement agencies; and advocate for best practice training for all law enforcement. We are working in collaboration with our law enforcement partners to

create and implement a strategic plan for reducing the level of domestic violence related homicides in our state. The Network actively supports excellence in law enforcement at all levels.

This year, following testimony from the Network, Sen. Sears proposed a bill (S.174) which asks the LEAB to create a statewide model policy regarding body cameras. As you might imagine, advocates who serve victims in cases where body cams are used at the scene of a domestic violence call, have many specific concerns regarding policy and practice of body cam usage. This particular topic is only one example of many topics addressed by the LEAB that strongly impact the lives, privacy, and safety of Vermont's victims.

Allowing the Network to become a full member of the LEAB will serve to enhance the quality of law enforcement policies and practices, assisting the law enforcement community in developing an even more comprehensive approach to providing the best services to Vermonters. In addition, the presence of the Vermont Network on the LEAB will ensure continued effective collaboration with all members who are seeking to provide educational resources to Vermonters about safety challenges.

The Network wishes to amend Section 14, subsection (a) of 20 VSA 1818 to read as follows:

(17) the Executive Director of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence or her/his designee

Thank you.