



Testimony on S.221
An Act Relating to Law Enforcement Officers
Senate Committee on Government Operations
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify about this legislation before your Committee. VCCVS also would like to thank the law enforcement community for their tireless efforts to keep our communities safe and for working with the Center to support crime victims.

VCCVS would like to propose that this bill also include a designated seat for a VCCVS representative to serve on the Criminal Justice Training Council alongside the other designated representatives. Doing so will solidify an already strong relationship with law enforcement and ensure that crime victim rights and the crime victim perspective remains a central aspect of law enforcement training. ***Currently, the full body CJTC does not include any victim representation, nor does the current CJTC include any lay people unaffiliated with law enforcement or prosecution.*** The CJTC currently does have an advisory Subcommittee on Domestic Violence, but that panel does not meet as frequently, nor does it address the full breadth of crime victim training concerns.

VCCVS Supports Crime Victims Across the State, Regardless of the Crime

For the past two decades, VCCVS has served Vermonters who have experienced all types of crime—from low-level property offenses to the most serious violent crimes—by:

- Managing federal and state funding for a variety of community programs, including programming to empower victims of domestic and sexual assault,

victims living with disabilities or who are elderly, unable to speak English, or who may have other unique needs;

- Funding state's attorney victim advocates in every county in Vermont; and by,
- Administering the Victims Compensation and Restitution Programs so that crime victims do not unnecessarily have to bear the uninsured financial consequences of their victimization.

VCCVS already works carefully with stakeholders involved at every stage of the criminal process to provide technical assistance on crime victim's rights (Chapter 165 of Title 13). State's attorney victim advocates are responsible for protecting many of the statutory victim rights, but law enforcement agencies have victim rights obligations as well:

- Under Section 5314 of Title 13, the law enforcement agency responsible for investigating a crime is required to promptly provide any victim with information about the availability of assistance for their medical, housing, counseling, and emergency services needs, information about the civil protection order process, and information about how to access records relevant to their case.
- Victims of listed crimes are entitled to more specific information about the case under 13 V.S.A. §§ 5308 and 5314.

As the criminal justice system continues to adapt to meet offender's needs, law enforcement's role in providing victims with information, especially information about an offender's conditions of release or the right to Victim's Compensation or Restitution, will become even more important. Likewise, as our understanding of how best to investigate and prosecute crimes of domestic and sexual violence evolves, training requirements for law enforcement will need to shift. Act 174, which mandates domestic violence training, is a good first step, but the CJTC has an opportunity to be even more proactive, without legislative intervention.

Allowing the VCCVS to join in the development of training standards for law enforcement will bring Vermont closer to ensuring that no crime victim lacks the information they need to keep themselves safe, that victims have access the programs and services to which they are entitled, and that investigative practices empower victims wherever possible.