



**Testimony on H.689 - House Committee on Government Operations  
February 8, 2018  
Auburn Watersong  
Policy Director**

The Network strongly supports H.689, which creates in statute the Council on Domestic Violence Coordinator position and ensures stable funding for all statewide, community-based domestic violence programming.

**See 15 VSA 1172**

The Vermont Network believes that some people who abuse their partners are capable of significant change. Some victims believe that their abusive partners can change, and would rather see them not continue within the criminal legal system, but learn from a group process how to change their behaviors. Community based domestic violence accountability programs across Vermont offer that possibility to perpetrators.

Currently, these 10 programs (across 12 counties) are statutorily required to meet certain standards. The Vermont Council on Domestic Violence is responsible for ensuring that the standards are met. The programs must be certified as compliant with the standards in order to receive referrals from the court, the Department of Corrections, or the Department for Children and Families. The Council certifies each program every two years via a thorough evaluation process, which involves an assessment by, and recommendation from, a local multi-disciplinary team.

In the past, the coordination of all of this program review and certification was funded by the State, and then more recently it was funded by other grant sources. **Today, there is no funding to coordinate this certification process to ensure that these groups meet the standards, and there is no funding designated for group facilitation or facilitator training.** The only funding the facilitators currently receive is based upon either a sliding fee scale charged to the participating offenders, many of whom face serious financial challenges, or a charge to Medicaid which pays only \$15 per person per session.

These programs are a critical resource; they provide a mechanism for accountability and a potential for transformation in the lives and choices of abusive partners. It is well beyond time to establish reliable and consistent support for these programs. It is unconscionable that a state which is determined to successfully reform the system of incarceration is not supporting alternatives and community programming for perpetrators working to change their lives.

Without these programs, perpetrators will likely be sent to anger management or individual psychotherapy – neither of which guarantees that the abuser will address her/his actions, recognize the abuse, understand gender-based violence, or be held accountable for her/his



choices. Under well-supported and trained facilitation, the curriculum offered in these programs serves to hold abusive partners accountable to one another and works to enforce change through positive peer influence.

**Suggested Amendment:**

Sec. 4. APPROPRIATIONS

The following amounts shall be appropriated to the ~~Center for Crime Victim Services~~ **Agency of Human Services** from the General Fund in fiscal year 2019:

- (1) \$91,000.00 for the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence Coordinator.
- (2) \$148,000.00 to support the Vermont domestic violence accountability programs.