

February 12, 2018

The Honorable Maida Townsend, Chair
Vermont House Government Operations Committee
Montpelier, VT

Madam Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

**Subject: Funding Community-based Domestic Violence Programming,
H.689**

My name is David Kiefner, and I write in support of bill H.689. I am the Risk Reduction Coordinator for the VTDOC Southwest Region, and oversee Interventionists delivering risk-reduction programming in 3 counties, and have held this position for almost 3 years. Prior to that, I was an Interventionist providing direct service to offenders for 5 years.

Beyond the above day job, I am also a community-based provider of Domestic Violence Accountability Programming to offenders in Rutland County, and have done so both here and in Franklin County for 8 years. During that time, I have served hundreds of offenders in the community, providing them necessary educational tools to reduce recidivism, as well as to improve all of their everyday relationships. To date, our results in providing these services have been generally in line with state risk-reduction programming recidivism vs. no programming intervention at all.

In DOC risk-reduction programming, we achieve the results we do by maintaining fidelity to the model of both the curricula and delivery methodology, via a system of regular review, audit, and professional development; this system is funded as part of the regular DOC budget. When the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence received such regular funding, this was not as much an issue. However, these valuable, professional DVAP services are now in jeopardy because of a shortfall in funding for the training and certification process coordinated by the VCDV.

My co-facilitating partner, Bianca, and I currently offer 2 groups in Rutland, both of which are full, and have waiting lists. We also have at least a half-dozen referrals waiting for intake. In order to maintain adherence to VCDV standards, this profusion of DV offenders has actually put us in the position of having to find time within our regular work schedules to start a third group, which will no doubt be almost immediately full. Although we are unable to bill Medicaid for our services, we are fortunate in that we both have full-time employment, and so are able to sustain the sliding fee and pro-bono services we provide to local offenders.

For some local providers however, this is not always possible. They rely upon offender fees to support themselves, as well as to maintain standards of professional training, continuing education, and certification to ensure state-wide consistency in the delivery of these services. For example, last year my partner and I attended training, a large part at our expense, to learn a promising new curriculum: Achieving Change Through Value-based Behaviors. Priority for ACTV attendance however, went to staff at correctional facilities where the program would be integrated into risk-reduction programming, and so only 3 community-based programs were offered space.

Therein lies another problem. Some of the offenders with whom we work are not under DOC supervision. Of participants in my program, several are referred by DCF, and in order to accept those referrals, community-based programs must be certified by the VCDV; this population remains otherwise unserved without the support of ongoing training and the services of a VCDV Coordinator.

In a state such as Vermont, we have a rich history of neighbors helping one another, and although we like to think of ourselves as self-reliant, that can only go so far. Continued funding of DV programs provides a critical community service for the following reasons:

1. It enables us to continually develop the programming we offer. For example, ACTV is a new, pilot curriculum, and helps offenders previously resistant to the more traditional Duluth model to succeed. It may even possibly later reach those unserved folks for whom Duluth is less relevant, e.g., women, same-gender, and non-intimate partner offenders.
2. Offenders receive the necessary tools to improve their skills in relationships with not only intimate partners, but all with whom they interact. In doing so, all of those folks are in hope of safer lives, free from abuse, thus helping break this cycle of violence.
3. It is cost-effective. The comparatively modest amount proposed in this legislation will directly and indirectly serve hundreds of our neighbors. When viewed next to the mere handful of offenders a like amount of money will incarcerate for a year, it is a bargain.
4. Lastly, it is a more proactive than reactive approach to keeping our communities safer by educating participants before they offend to the level of far more expensive involvement in the criminal justice system.

In closing, I reiterate my support for H.689 as introduced, and offer my thanks for your time and attention.

Sincerely,
David Kiefner
Risk Reduction Coordinator
VTDOC SW Region

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