

February 13, 2018

Representative Maida Townsend  
Chair, Government Operations Committee

Re: H.689 (Funding for Domestic Violence Accountability Programs)

Dear Rep. Townsend and Committee Members,

I am asking for and encouraging your support for H.689, legislation that helps Vermont take domestic violence seriously. Funding for a full-time person to coordinate the Vermont Domestic Violence Council and oversee certification of domestic violence accountability programs will ensure that appropriate, effective educational programs are available. Funding for the operation of community based domestic violence programs ensures that they are accessible to those who ought to attend.

Men who abuse their partners can change but they are unlikely to do so without targeted help. Domestic violence accountability programs offer the tools they need to change. When abusers use these tools and make changes, the safety of past and future domestic partners is increased, their children's exposure to trauma is decreased, and the general health of the community is strengthened.

It is far less expensive and more effective to provide abusers help in making changes than to incarcerate them. While it may make sense to expect those who committed the abuse to pay for the programming, it is not financially possible to run a domestic violence accountability program on user fees alone. To do so requires those who need to attend the program to pay at a rate that far exceeds their financial resources. It has come to my attention that abusers who should be in a targeted domestic violence accountability program are sometimes being allowed by the Court to go to health insurance funded individual counseling instead. While this strategy is responsive to the abuser's financial realities, it is a dangerous one because it can deepen the use of power and control tactics and create more risk and harm for victims.

At the Montpelier Community Justice Center we are piloting a new, evidence-based domestic violence accountability program that is scheduled to begin later this week. We are able to offer this program for 26 weeks using existing resources but we will be unable to continue it, despite the need, unless there is funding to support it. Those who have been

referred to this program are expected to pay \$35/week for each of the 26 weeks. This amount, which is unaffordable for most of the participants, will only generate about half the cost of running the program. Participants would have to pay at least \$55/week (under optimal circumstances) to fund the program strictly with user fees. The participants, on average, can afford about \$10- \$15/week and even less if they are unemployed. In order for us to follow the standards for domestic violence accountability programs we will have to end the participation of those who do not pay, thus denying critical programming to those who need it. Sadly, I expect this to be the reality of our experience within a few weeks of beginning the program. Public funding is sorely needed.

All Vermonters will be better off when all people experience safety and justice in their homes. Please vote for H.689 and funding that supports the availability and accessibility of domestic violent accountability programs for all who need it.

Thank you,

Yvonne Byrd, Director  
Montpelier Community Justice Center



