

**Vermont Care Partners
Testimony on S.145
Julie Tessler
April 11, 2017**

Vermont Care Partners strongly supports H.145, an act relating to establishing a Mental Health Crisis Response Commission, because it creates a creative opportunity for oversight and improving law enforcement interactions with people experiencing mental health crises by digging into the root causes of critical incidents. This level of analysis is essential for developing improved responses to these circumstances that will ultimately save lives.

Vermont Care Partners and representatives of designated agencies have participated in meetings of the Grennon Group which has been looking at ways to improve law enforcement interactions with people in mental health crisis. In fact, we had a very well-attended special meeting back in November with members of the Commission to share ideas and experiences from the designated agency perspective. We see this as a shared responsibility and we have a strong commitment to doing our part to prevent such incidents from occurring and also being an effective part of the response when the incidents do occur.

To be proactive, the Department of Mental Health has partnered with Vermont Care Partners and Washington County Mental Health Services to have Kristen Chandler conduct Team Two training to bring law enforcement and mental health professionals together to learn how to better interact with people experiencing mental health crises. Participation in the training is voluntary and some police departments have limited resources making it difficult for officers to attend full-day trainings.

When a mental health crisis arises, whether it is within a family home, at a high school or in a public place, it is critical that the first responders are trained in mental health issues, in mental health law and in working together to resolve the crisis. Team Two seeks to both educate the first responder and to build the relationships necessary to working together in crisis. The training provides an overview of relevant mental health statutes and a refresher on mandatory law enforcement mental health training (ACT 80). Three different scenarios are role played in break-out sessions with local teams of police and mobile crisis workers where specifics of response to the scenarios are discussed in detail. Small groups report back to the entire group to hear feedback and discuss strategies. A short video on law enforcement response to situations involving persons with autism is shown and discussed. Participants learn from a panel presentation which includes a person with mental illness, a family member, a crisis clinician and a law enforcement officer who all share personal stories. Finally, in another break-out session, the audience hears about resources in their particular region.

Vermont Care Partners, through VCN, has secured funding through the Vermont Department of Mental Health in partnership with the Department of Public Safety to implement the Team Two curriculum throughout Vermont. Kristin Chandler, Team Two's Statewide Coordinator, is working under the supervision of Washington County Mental Health to implement the training curriculum where law enforcement and mental health crisis workers collaborate on responding to a mental health crisis. The Vermont Cooperative for Practice Improvement and Innovation is collecting data and conducting the Team Two evaluation. This year, Team Two is being expanded to developmental service crisis workers and 911 responders.

TEAM TWO STEERING COMMITTEE

Keith Clark, Windham County Sheriff

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director, NAMI

Chief Anthony Facos, Montpelier Police Department

Anthony Folland, Vermont Department of Health, ADAP

Mourning Fox, LCMHC, Care Management Director, Department of Mental Health

Gary Gordon, Coordinator, Crisis Services Team, Washington County Mental Health

Captain Ingrid Jonas, Staff Operations Commander, Vermont State Police

Kate Lamphere, HCRS Emergency Services Director

Mary Moulton, Executive Director, Washington County Mental Health

Catherine Reed, Family Member

Ed Riddell, M.S., DDS Public Safety Specialist, DDSD / DAIL / AHS / State of Vermont

Doris Sage, Family Member

Cindy Taylor-Patch, Director of Training, Vermont Police Academy