



VERMONT  
NETWORK

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**Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs  
Auburn Watersong  
Policy Director**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

The Vermont Network supports bill H.711. For survivors of domestic and sexual violence, the fear of falling into poverty prevents them from coming forward, seeking support and justice. Honoring and empowering survivors' choices is a fundamental component of the work that our advocates do. Sadly, for many survivors the choices that might feel best for them come with too many barriers and risks. H.711 would provide protection for victims in employment and remove some barriers to them accessing the criminal justice system.

According to one study, 50% of sexual assault victims lost their jobs or were forced to quit in the aftermath of rape (Ellis, Atkeson, & Calhoun, 1993). Between one-quarter and one-half of domestic violence victims report that they lost a job, at least in part, due to domestic violence. (Miller, T., M. Cohen & B. Wiersema, January 1996). What this tells us is that many victims are faced with losing income at a time when maintaining economic stability and independence is most critical. At a time when victims are most vulnerable, our society punishes them by creating economic consequences to reporting or following through with the prosecution of a crime.

To quote a Vermont survivor "When you leave your partner after having experienced domestic violence, you feel like you are losing everything- your home, your relationship, your entire world is being turned upside down, the last thing you need is to lose your job."

Here are a couple of stories of survivors experiencing this type of discrimination here in Vermont:

- An abuser and victim worked at the same company. The victim filed an RFA against her abuser. Because of this the abuser was not supposed to have contact with the victim. Instead of working with the victim to create a safer work environment, the company fired the victim and the abuser stayed employed.
- I spoke with a survivor yesterday who was using her lunch breaks to meet with her advocate and attorneys after experiencing domestic violence. She sometimes went over her hour lunch break, making up the hours at the end of the day or taking her paid time off when needed. She had a conversation with her employer at the beginning about what was going on in hopes that they would be flexible with her as they were with other employees (on issues such as childcare, illness etc). The work environment that was created during the 4 months that she was going through these criminal proceedings was



so uncomfortable that she got HR involved and eventually went on medical leave due to anxiety attacks. This survivor loves her job. She worked hard to maintain a high quality of work performance during this difficult time in her life. Her quality of work was never questioned, yet she felt discriminated against because she was a victim of a crime. As she stated just this past February “It is hard enough getting up every day and going to work after having been a victim of a crime, nevermind being discriminated against at work. I was trying to maintain some sense of normalcy in my life; my job was a part of that”.

By working with employees that are victims of crime to create a flexible and safe work environment, employers increase employee productivity and help victims maintain employment. A victim’s financial stability should never be at risk simply because they were a victim of a crime.

Thank you.