



Vermont Businesses
for Social Responsibility

H.711 Protected Employment for Crime Victims

Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and
General Affairs
April 20, 2018

Testimony by Daniel Barlow
VBSR Public Policy Manager

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR) is a non-profit, statewide business trade organization with a mission to advance business ethics that value multiple bottom lines- economic, social, and environmental.

We strive to help members set a high standard for protecting the natural, human and economic environments of the state's residents, while remaining profitable. Founded in 1991, VBSR has more than 700 members across Vermont.

The ability for a victim to report a crime and participate in our justice system is a foundation of our civil society. The lack of employment protections for the victims of violent or tragic crimes creates barriers to justice.

More than thirty states have laws prohibiting employment discrimination against certain types of crime victims. Vermont law currently protects employment for individuals called to testify in a criminal proceeding, but does not extend those rights to other aspects of accessing the protective and restorative tools of our justice system.

Numerous studies have shown that one of the largest contributors to a domestic violence victim not returning to their abuser is their ability to remain economically independent. Domestic violence, and other violent or tragic crimes, often jeopardizes a victim's ability to keep a job or fulfill their normal work responsibilities.

The potential schedule interruptions for a victim include:

- Filing a police report
- Appearing in court
- Seeking medical attention
- Finding safe and appropriate housing
- Obtaining a protective order

Crime victims are also often afraid to discuss their experiences with their employers. Studies on the workplace impact of violent crimes shows that:

- 46% (less than half) informed their managers or supervisors.
- Only 43% told a co-worker.¹
- 54% opted not tell anyone out of fear of retaliation or shame.²

Thresholds based on business size

The number of employees tends to be an inaccurate indicator of a company's ability to adhere to changes in employment law. VBSR expects that scheduling disruptions could occur for some small businesses. What would be worse is creating an artificial barrier that prohibits a victim from seeking safety and justice.

¹ Swanberg, J., & Logan, T.K. (2005). Domestic violence and employment: A qualitative study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10(1), 3-17.

² American Institute on Domestic Violence. (2001). *Domestic violence in the workplace statistics*. Retrieved 7/1/06 from aidv-usa.com/statistics.htm.