

Dear Senators,

I urge you to support H. 219 as is, without any amendments. The bill itself is logical and represents good governance.

From my perspective, the notion that DCF is not qualified to run the VSNIP program is absurd. Claims of DCF being unfit to run the VSNIP program arose after the VSNIP contract was awarded to my nonprofit organization, VT-CAN!, in 2012, and not to the current administrator.

After losing the bid in 2012, the current administrator sued AHS. Her case was dismissed and she appealed to the Vermont Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision. If I were to question anything about DCF, it is why they awarded the VSNIP contract to someone who sued them, cost them a great deal of money in attorneys' fees and staff time to comply with FOIA requests, and constantly disparages them publicly, when another highly qualified applicant came in at a lower bid (not VT-CAN!).

When VT-CAN! administered the VSNIP program from October of 2012 through September of 2013, DCF made tending to the needs of clients quite easy. Because the majority of the VSNIP clientele are on a state assistance program, those who struggled with the application could be approved or denied by us contacting DCF to check their database. It made so much sense to me that DCF run VSNIP, I actually suggested it while administering the program!

There was so much duplication of efforts in being an outside contractor for an income-sensitive voucher program of the sort AHS handles constantly. It quickly

became clear that using an outside contractor made it more labor-intensive for DCF in the long run. It was my realization about the fundamental flaw in the system, as well as the current VSNIP administrator's lawsuit against the departments who oversaw VSNIP since its inception (the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Children and Families), along with harassment of my clinic staff and volunteers, that caused my organization not to renew the DCF contract and stop administering the program after one year.

A loud minority is circulating misleading information about the VSNIP program and the competency of DCF. Since I was unwittingly caught up in the VSNIP controversy and false allegations, I would be happy to share more of the history and facts with you. Feel free to email or call me on my cell phone at 802-272-7402.

A summary of the lawsuit is pasted below. As Vermont resident, I regard the amount of money this frivolous lawsuit cost the state because one person/organization did not get a contract to be mind-boggling. Can you imagine if every unsuccessful bidder for a state contract sued the state? As someone who started a low-cost spay/neuter clinic that has done over 25,000 surgeries (over 5,000 of them at no cost to owners) and works with organizations across Vermont and the country, I know that the reason a simple state sponsored spay/neuter program is so complicated is because of one individual. If the cost and time to DCF if they ever need to take the program in-house again is a concern, I assure you, it would cost less in both time and money, and be run smoothly and in accordance with the current rules.

Justia Opinion Summary

The Vermont Spay/Neuter Incentive Program (VSNIP) was created in 2006 to subsidize dog, cat, and wolf-hybrid sterilization procedures for low-income Vermonters. Sue Skaskiw and the organization she directed, Vermont Volunteer Services for Animals Humane Society (VVSA), administered the VSNIP program from its inception in 2006 until the expiration of Skaskiw's contract in October 2012. Defendant Vermont Agency of Agriculture initially managed the program but responsibility was transferred to defendant Department for Children and Families (DCF), a department within the Agency of Human Services, in 2011. Defendant Kristin Haas was an employee of the Agency of Agriculture; defendants Kathleen Smith and Carol Maloney were employees of DCF. Sometime after the program's inception, the Agency of Agriculture contracted with Skaskiw to run VSNIP. She still held the contract when responsibility shifted to DCF in 2011, but at that time DCF put the contract out for a competitive bid. Two bidders, Skaskiw and VT-CAN!, submitted proposals, and VT-CAN! won the contract. Skaskiw subsequently filed this lawsuit. Skaskiw appealed the trial court's decision to grant the motion to dismiss of defendants Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Department for Children and Families, Haas, Smith, and Maloney on Skaskiw's claims of defamation, violation of due process, economic interference, and failure to discharge a mandatory duty. Finding no reversible error, the Supreme Court affirmed.

Sincerely,

Pamela Krausz

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