



REVISED MEMO: COVID Response and Recovery: Supports for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence
Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director
June 5th, 2020

Thank you for your work on judiciary-related COVID supports and recovery. As Vermont moves toward stabilization and recovery, continued investment in community-based supports for victims of domestic and sexual violence will be essential. While the committee's current discussion involves the use of Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) wherein costs must be incurred and paid for by December 31st, 2020, investment in supports to survivors will require ongoing and long-term investments beyond this calendar year.

At the request of this committee, this memo has been revised and prioritized with funding requirements attached. This list contains only items where costs and expenses are in the direct purview of the Vermont Network.

- **Remote operations of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs: \$130,000¹**

There are 13 community-based Domestic Violence Accountability Programs (DVAP) in Vermont. These programs offer treatment to address violence and coercive control with individuals who use violence against their intimate partners with a goal of reducing future violence. Each DVAP program is certified by the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence and must meet a set of over 50 statewide standards in order to operate. These programs currently rely solely on participant fees for operations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated that these programs transition immediately to remote operations. Treatment groups are now being help remotely. There is no funding to support the transition to remote operations, other than participant fees. With the widespread economic impacts of the pandemic, participants are even less likely than before to be able to pay for this treatment. The state has previously worked to reduce unnecessary fees for defendants and to facilitate their utilization of treatment. These funds will provide \$10,000 to each DVAP program in Vermont to be used for expenses incurred due to the transition to remote services. This request is wholly separate from the Justice Reinvestment (S. 338) appropriations request which will also serve to support these programs.

- **Supports for incarcerated and re-entering victims of domestic and sexual violence: \$197,000²**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Corrections has worked to isolate virus exposure of incarcerated individuals and limit the total number of individuals housed in facilities in order to

¹ This appropriation could flow through the Vermont Department of Corrections

² This appropriation could flow through the Vermont Department of Corrections



reduce the spread of the virus within Vermont prisons. These efforts, while laudable, also have the potential to increase isolation and risk for victimization. In addition, recently released survivors have inadequate supports available to ensure successful re-entry.

The Vermont Network operates a program (DIVAS) in the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility providing advocacy and supports to incarcerated victims of domestic and sexual violence. This investment would allow for the DIVAS program to provide support to re-entering survivors as they transition out of incarceration. In addition, these funds would allow the DIVAS program to begin providing remote services to incarcerated male victims of domestic and sexual violence in Vermont.

- **Investment in no-cost legal representation for victims of domestic and sexual violence: \$80,000³**

As a result of the pandemic, many victims are facing increasingly complex civil and family court matters. Prior to the pandemic, it was already difficult for victims to gain access to low or no-cost legal representation for civil and family matters. The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, with many victims facing increased economic insecurity or loss of income. These funds will be used by the Justice for Victims Legal Clinic at the Vermont Network to provide additional no-cost legal representation to victims of domestic and sexual violence statewide. These funds will be especially important as the Judiciary works to resume non-emergency operations.

- **Support for Vermont's Forensic Nursing Program to support access to medical care for victims of domestic and sexual violence during COVID: \$160,000⁴**

The pandemic has heightened the risk of sexual violence and abuse for adult and child victims. One of the primary resources available for victims is medical care from trained forensic nurses who provide care and make referrals to services for victims of assault. Forensic nurses also collect evidence which may be used in legal proceedings. Previously, advocates were almost always present during forensic exams to provide support to victims. During the current pandemic, hospitals have restricted the access of advocates to provide support to victims during these exams as an infection control strategy. These funds will provide small grants to hospital forensic nursing programs or advocacy organizations to fund efforts to facilitate remote advocacy during exams or other methods to enhance and improve services for patients during and beyond the pandemic.

³ This appropriation could flow through the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services

⁴ This appropriation could flow through the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services