



20-0731 - An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government

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Thank you for the invitation to testify today. The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence in our state. We represent 15 Member Organizations throughout the state which provide advocacy and support to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Together, these organizations serve every town in Vermont. In 2019 member programs helped 8,760 individuals and reached 12,000 youth through prevention programming in schools and other settings throughout our state.

I am here today to request a \$500,000 increase in state funding for the Vermont Network and our 15 member programs. We currently receive an allocation through the Center for Crime Victims Services, but **this appropriation has not seen an increase since 2008**. In the past 12 years, the landscape and scope of our work has changed dramatically. The opiate crisis and ongoing issues with affordable housing have made it increasingly difficult for survivors to find and maintain safety and stability. Emergency shelter stays for the past 3 years have increased from a few weeks to an average length of stay of 52 days. As the Vermont continues to innovate and invest in criminal justice reform efforts, those efforts must include investments in meeting the needs of victims and survivors.

Our programs are both resourceful and tenacious and have managed to maintain quality care for survivors in need across the state, but they are increasingly doing more with fewer resources. Many programs have cut staff and are relying more and more on volunteers to provide critical services, such as our 24-hour hotlines. When asked about the landscape, one Executive Director stated, "I know that we should be doing outreach in our community, but I can't see how, when we cannot adequately provide services for all the people who do find out about us and walk in our door."

We know that advocacy services work. Survivors who work with advocates have lower risks of re-abuse and are more connected to community supports. In 2019, 98% of the survivors served by member organizations of the Vermont Network reported that, as a result of the advocacy they received, they knew more about their rights and options. Studies indicate that when advocates are present in the legal and medical proceedings following assault, victims fare better in both the short- and long-term, experiencing less psychological distress, physical health struggles, sexual risk-taking behaviors, self-blame, guilt and depression. Investment in advocacy services is an investment in the safety and well-being of Vermonters.

Although the needs of our programs are on-going, we would still greatly benefit from an infusion of one-time funds. Here are just a few of the many, many ways in which the Vermont Network and the 15



member programs across the state have identified that they could utilize one-time funds to support our communities and survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

- Expand emergency housing shelter
- Implement a county-wide Lethality Assessment Protocol in Addison County
- Transitional housing support funds for survivors
- System upgrades to increase the ability to keep client data secure
- Expand shelter capacity to help people exit sex trafficking
- Complete energy efficiency upgrades to our buildings to increase long-term savings
- Increase our volunteer recruitment, training and support
- Repair/replace outdated and partially functional security system
- Grant Writing Consultation to build capacity to effectively find, apply, and receive grants
- Conduct a Statewide Community Needs Assessment to better understand LGBTQ+ survivors' needs statewide

These are just a few of the ways our member organizations have envisioned being able to utilize one time funds to invest in the wellbeing of victims and survivors of crime. Thank you for your consideration.

Sources:

Sullivan, C.M. (2012, October). Advocacy Services for Women with Abusive Partners: A Review of the Empirical Evidence, Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

Campbell, R. (2006). Rape survivors' experiences with the legal and medical systems: Do rape victim advocates make a difference? *Violence Against Women*, 12, 30-45. doi:10.1177/1077801205277539