



Vermont Network COVID-19 Appropriations Request

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Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director

Domestic and sexual violence organizations have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 15 Member Organizations of the Vermont Network serve victims of domestic and sexual violence in communities throughout Vermont. Over the past several weeks, these organizations have worked to radically adjust service delivery models while providing uninterrupted services to victims across the state as essential workers. After an initial period of quiet, organizations across the state are reporting more victims reaching out and those who are seeking help are in complex and violent situations complicated by the pandemic. **In order to continue providing uninterrupted services, the Vermont Network and its member organizations are requesting funds to support core operations. We support the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services request for \$623,690 to support services for victims of domestic and sexual violence.**

Vermont Network Member Organizations are experiencing and anticipating increased costs in the following areas as a result of the protracted pandemic:

- Shelter Operations – Shelters are spending and anticipate spending additional funds on specialized cleaning, cleaning supplies, and the replacement of shelter supplies which must be removed if a shelter resident tests positive.
- Crisis Pay to Staff – Advocates have been deemed Essential Personnel by the State of Vermont, and member organizations are paying staff who are engaged in higher risk, community-based work including delivering food to hotels where some survivors are now housed, attending RFA hearings in-person, and supporting shelter residents.
- Direct Financial Support for Survivors – Survivors' needs for safe housing, food security, and utilities has grown significantly.
- Equipment for providing remote services – Member organizations need to purchase laptops, tablets and other equipment necessary for advocacy to be provided remotely. Additional software is needed to establish web-based chatline and text options for survivors. HIPAA-compliant virtual meeting applications are needed for staff to communicate with each other, as well as conduct support groups.
- Core Operations – Funding for core operations has been compromised for many Member Organizations. Planned fundraising events and efforts relying on private and community sources of funds have been cancelled, jeopardizing current staffing levels across the Network.

The estimated COVID-related costs for member organizations totals \$756,700 for the period of March 2020 through June 2021, with an additional \$50,000 for the Network itself, due to increased costs for attorneys and costs related to working offsite. Taking into consideration federal COVID-19 emergency funds allocated to Vermont to be used to offset some of these costs, the expected need for the Network and the programs is an additional \$623,690.