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To: House Appropriations Committee
From: Jennifer Poehlmann, J.D., Executive Director, Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services
Date: January 10, 2022
RE: Budget Adjustment Proposal for FY22

Vermont's "Stay Safe, Stay Home" orders, and the stressors of the pandemic have resulted in increases in the number and severity of cases of domestic violence, child abuse and other violent crimes. Crime victims who have experienced unimaginable traumatic events are supported by essential services that are funded in part by Vermont's Special Funds. We would be remiss in underestimating the long-term impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on those navigating a course to safety from the isolation of their homes. Because of this reality, the services that are supported by the Center for Crime Victim Services (CCVS) are more important now than ever.

Revenues from traffic tickets and criminal convictions that support the Compensation Special Fund are experiencing an unprecedented decrease. These fines and fees pay for victim's crime related losses; funeral expenses, counseling, medical expenses, and relocations are just some of the ways these funds help crime victims. The amount that the state contributes to the Victims Compensation Program each year is then matched in the following year by the federal government at an amount equal to 75% of the state's contribution. Thus, future revenues could be at jeopardy as well. Revenues have continued to decline into State Fiscal Year 2022.

While the years-long downward trend in special fund revenues has long been identified by the Vermont Legislature as a priority area needing attention, the pandemic has created a crisis in funding for essential services to support Vermonters who have experienced significant and even life-altering harm. The closure of the courts due to the pandemic and a decline in the issuance of traffic tickets has resulted in decreases in revenues that can no longer be otherwise accounted for. Programs and providers are asked to do more with less, as we have seen an upward trend in the demand for services, along with the complexity of the presenting problems. Without the provision of general funds to offset these losses, the impact on victim services, including those impacting victims of child abuse and domestic and sexual violence, will be catastrophic.

CCVS Budget Adjustment Request

Compensation Special Fund	\$1,300,000
Domestic and Sexual Violence Fund	\$ 250,000
Legal Services for Victims	<u>\$ 112,000</u>
Total Budget Adjustment Request:	\$1,662,000



Compensation Special Fund (13 VSA §5359)- \$1,300,000

The Compensation Special Fund supports:

- Victim compensation claims
- Supervised Visitation Programs (SVP) and the SVP coordinator position
- Domestic Violence (DV) Council Coordinator position.
- Vermont's Victim Assistance Program (VAP), which provides support for the 27 advocates who work within Vermont's 14 State's Attorneys offices- the SFY22 budget includes a one-time GF appropriation of \$712,537 to support the VAP.
- The operational and personnel expenses for CCVS (the primary support)- in the past 3 years, CCVS has reduced staff by 9 FTE positions (from 25 FTE to 16FTE).

The current SFY22 Compensation Fund budget was already decreased based on declining trends in SFY's 18, 19, 20 and 21. However, the current revenues for the first five months of SFY 22 are 47% below those of SFY21 for the same period, a record decline.

Based on the current projections. CCVS is requesting a SFY22 budget adjustment of \$1.3 million to meet the current grant funded programs and services.

Domestic and Sexual Violence Fund (13 VSA §5360) - \$250,000

The Domestic and Sexual Violence Fund supports the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence programs, the DV/SV trainer, and the DV Council Coordinator positions. The current SFY22 revenue projections for the first 5 months show that the DV/SV fund will not meet the SFY22 budget allocation to support the grants that have been issued to the Vermont Network programs. CCVS received a one-time GF appropriation of \$345K in SFY22 to support these programs. All the DV/SV funds are used to support the Vermont Network programs and services and no funds are used to support CCVS operations.

CCVS is requesting a budget adjustment of an additional \$250,000 to meet the current grant obligations.

Legal Services for Victims- \$112,000

The Vermont Network Legal Clinic is one of the only providers of pro-bono divorce and custody cases for victims and serves a critical role in representing domestic and sexual violence survivors in various civil matters related to or impacted by their victimization. The Vermont Network has had the Legal Assistance for Victims grant through the Office on Violence Against Women for the past three years. Unfortunately, this discretionary grant was recently discontinued, and the program needs bridge funding for the next 9 months. The Clinic has served 841 survivors of sexual and domestic violence and stalking; 258 related to sexual violence, 547 related to domestic or dating violence, and 48 related to stalking. Of the clients served, 53 were homeless when they reached out to the Clinic, and 44 survivors identified as LGBTQ. Without bridge funding, the Clinic will be forced to close.

CCVS is requesting a budget adjustment of \$112,000 to enable the Clinic to continue to provide legal services not otherwise available to or affordable for victims of domestic and sexual violence or child abuse.

We thank you for willingness to consider our total budget adjustment request of **\$1,662,000**.