



**Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
FY 2023 Budget Request**

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence represents 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 2021, member organizations supported approximately 8,000 individuals and answered over 21,000 hotline calls – a 25% increase over the previous year. Across the state, advocates and survivors report increased severity and complexity of the violence being experienced by survivors of domestic and sexual violence because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Vermont Network has responded to the unprecedented needs of survivors during the past year.

The Vermont Network supports the budget request of the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services

The Vermont Network and our 15 member organizations are largely funded through the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services. Shortfalls in special funds such as the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund, have created significant funding issues for victim services providers across the state. The Center's budget request aims to address these shortfalls, and we ask the committee to please support their budget request in its entirety. We hope that the General Assembly discusses the recent report completed by the Joint Fiscal Office regarding structural funding issues within victim services and uses the FY23 budget as an opportunity to move towards more sustainable funding models.

The Vermont Network is seeking a **one-time appropriation of \$48,000 in the FY 23 budget to keep the only statewide legal clinic for victims of domestic and sexual violence operational for the entirety of 2022**. Due to a cut in federal funding, the clinic faces a one-time shortfall which extends from January 1, 2022 – September 30, 2022. The Justice for Victims Clinic hopes to access a federal grant in October of 2022 to support continued operations of the clinic. This committee has already extended bridge funding for the clinic in the FY22 BAA and this one-time ask is to fund the legal clinic from July - September. The Justice for Victims Clinic is operated by the Vermont Network and provides direct, legal representation to victims of domestic and sexual violence in court proceedings. The Clinic also contracts with private attorneys who agree to be paid a low-bono rate by the Vermont Network to provide free representation to victims in their communities. This allows victims in the most rural regions of Vermont to access representation. In 2021, the Justice for Victims clinic provided legal representation to 427 victims of domestic and sexual violence. Importantly, the Justice for Victims clinic is the only pro-bono legal services provider in Vermont offering representation to child victims of sexual abuse and representation to domestic violence victims in child custody proceedings.

The Vermont Network is seeking a one-time ask of \$100,000 to conduct a housing needs assessment. This would fund the National Alliance for Safe Housing to perform a statewide domestic and sexual violence housing assessment to inform a master plan for housing victims of domestic and sexual violence in Vermont. We know that survivors experience significant housing needs which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.



This assessment would identify where the gaps are in emergency, transitional and permanent affordable housing for victims and a clear action plan on how to fill them.

We thank the committee for its consideration.