

February 17, 2022

Chair Grad, Representative Rachelson, and Representative Leffler,

I am writing to you neither as a member of the Vermont Criminal Justice Council nor as a research associate employed with Crime Research Group (CRG), but as a parent, uncle, brother, and son whose family suffered through a very public tragedy. The subject of this letter is H.533 - Criminal procedure; forfeiture; seizure – and, more importantly, how the committee's work on this bill could be transformative for Vermonters experiencing traumatic events which impact, and are impacted by, the state's criminal justice system.

I will not delve into the pros and cons of the bill itself, its practicality, or its viability. Instead, I will speak to the bill through the lens of its ultimate passage, and how its modification could serve the greater Vermont community. In brief, I implore the committee to consider allowing the continued and unabated forfeiture of assets seized through narcotics investigations, and to earmark a healthy portion of the funds to the office of the Victim Services Director within the VSP Major Crimes Unit.

All too often, victims and others impacted by criminal activity are underserved by our criminal justice system. Empathetic guidance, advice, and information about the availability of mental health resources can and must be the first step to addressing both short-term and life-course traumas when tragedies occur. These are the ethical and timely services provided by staff within the Victims Service office, and those services should be more fully funded and built out throughout the state before those traumas do irreparable damage to victims and victims' families. Such an expansion preserves the direct connection between asset forfeiture and the law enforcement, and furthers the creation trust and legitimacy between police and the communities they serve.

To personalize this request, I offer that our family is more fortunate than most. We enjoyed access to the highest standards of care through our shared tragedy, but even with that access we as a family could have splintered and been torn asunder if not for the care and compassion delivered by the victims' advocates in DPS. All victims deserve the same. Fund the program. Expand it. And make the transformational change to our system of community care and resilience.

Please feel free to share this with your colleagues, place into the record, and accept it as a demonstration of my willingness to share my thoughts directly if you each believe my testimony would be of value to the committee.

Warm regards, be safe, and keep up the good work.

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