



FY 22 Budget – Section G 201
House Judiciary Committee, May 12th
Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director

The Vermont Network and our 15 Member Organizations provide direct services to victims of domestic and sexual violence across Vermont. We receive funds from two sources of state funding – the General Fund and the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund.

Regarding the General Fund, the Member Organizations of the Vermont Network have not received an increase in funding since 2008. Over the past thirteen years, these organizations have expanded services and continued to serve every square mile of Vermont, even in a climate of flat state revenues. Throughout this legislative session, the Vermont Network has been advocating for an increase in funding to assist our Members in serving victims who have been impacted by the slowdown or suspension of the judicial system during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were successful in getting these funds allocated in the Senate version of the budget, as you see in Section G 201 of the budget. We thank the Senate for this small increase and hope the House also supports it.

Today, I am here to speak with you about the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund. This Special Fund was established in 2008, is set forth in 13 V.S.A. § 5360 and is administered by the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services. The fund serves as a primary revenue source for critically important services for victims, as well as systems which improve public responses to domestic and sexual violence. Specifically, the fund provides just short of \$1 million for:

- Basic services at the fifteen member organizations of the Vermont Network
- Direct, emergency supports for victims, such as direct assistance with rental or utility deposits
- Services for LGBTQ victims of domestic and sexual violence through the Pride Center of Vermont
- Services for deaf and hard of hearing survivors through Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services
- 50% of the Domestic Violence Trainer position at the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council.

On May 10th, we were made aware for the first time that the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund is at a significant deficit for FY 2021 and an even deeper deficit is anticipated for FY 2022, especially in light of the need to use FY 2022 funds to “pay back” the deficit for FY 2021. The revenue sources for the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund are comprised of fines and fees as well as a surcharge on marriage licenses. These revenue sources were severely adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While we have known for several years that there are long-term structural revenue problems with declining fines and fees, we were not notified of the current fiscal year deficit or the projected upcoming fiscal year deficit prior to May 10th, which is why we testifying to you today at this late date. Despite the small increase in General Fund to the Member Organizations, organizations serving domestic and sexual violence survivors are now facing the potential for a significant funding cut with the shortfall in the Special Fund. Notice of this funding cut comes just over 45 days from the beginning of the new fiscal year.



While the Senate version of the budget acknowledges that changes need to be made with the appointment of a study committee to look at this funding source, we cannot wait until the Study Committee completes its work to address this significant shortfall. Therefore, we ask that the House Judiciary Committee strongly encourage the House Appropriations Committee to respond to Chris Fenno's emergency request for ARPA funding for the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund to prevent significant cuts to services for victims of domestic and sexual violence in the midst of the pandemic.