

Mel Motel, Director of Brattleboro Community Justice Center
Joint Justice Oversight Testimony – September 28, 2022

Hello, my name is Mel Motel. I'm the Director of the Brattleboro Community Justice Center. In fact, I co-direct the restorative justice department at our Agency along with another co-director. I oversee the Department of Corrections restorative justice funding: the Community Justice Center grant; my Co-Director oversees RJ funding from the Attorney General's Office and from Department of Children and Families.

From 2003-2021, the BCJC was housed at the Town of Brattleboro. A year ago, the BCJC (3 staff) moved from the Town to merge with the restorative justice programs at Youth Services of Windham County, thus bringing all State-funded restorative justice programs under one roof at Youth Services, a non-profit with approximately 25 staff, a 50 year history of serving people of all ages in the community, and years of experience running AGO- and DCF-funded restorative justice programs.

Since you have asked for testimony on CJs, I will share about our CJC programs, specifically. Since bringing all RJ programs together under one roof last year, the CJC's scope hasn't substantially changed. The CJC grant from the DOC continues to support all the DOC programs and services noted on the [table](#) you received: dispute resolution at the community level, restorative pre-charge direct from law enforcement or the State's Attorney, reparative boards, and reentry services such as COSA.

But, now that we are all under one roof, the BCJC is part of a 9-person department that includes the RJ programs and services funded by AGO and DCF. (Everything on that table is covered by our department.) Our RJ department also receives additional funding from outside of these 3 State sources to craft programs specific to the needs of our community that are not covered by these sources. Furthermore, our RJ department is part of an agency that provides an array of other programs outside of RJ, funded by a variety of funding sources: federal funding, foundation grants, individual donations, and more.

The "one stop shop" model is working really well for our community. However, I want to note that the choice to merge all RJ programs was a local decision that came from years of conversation and consideration for our local context. I understand that this may not necessarily be the right path for all locations.

The CJC programs are accountable to our funders, the DOC. We are also accountable to our broader agency and its Board, our other funders, community partners including those who refer folks to us, and—importantly—our community.

I am also here as a member of the recent workgroup that Heather mentioned.

I want to underscore some of the recommendations that Heather shared:

(1) Geographic equity. All parts of the state receive funding from all three State sources—DOC, AGO, and DCF—for RJ programming. However, as Heather pointed out, prosecutorial discretion impacts referrals to various restorative justice programs. For example, this may result in geographic inequity such as higher numbers of referrals to pre-charge programs in some counties and low—or no—referrals in others.

Pre-charge and Court Diversion policies and practices need to be reviewed, with an eye to racial and economic equity, in addition to geographic equity.

(2) Multiple funding sources. Multiple state funding sources, or diversified funding streams, help to ensure stronger organizations that are able to be flexible and responsive to community needs and withstand changes in legislative and administrative priorities.

(3) Engage those directly impacted. I'd like to add my personal recommendation that, also with an eye to racial and economic equity, people and organizations directly impacted by the criminal justice system—adult and youth—should be part of future investigations and analyses of how State-funded RJ is working in Vermont.

Thank you for inviting us to share about the CJsCs with you. I hope that we are able to move forward in a way that ensures clarity and equity while recognizing the unique context of the communities where RJ programs are located. I hope that we are able to move forward in a way that prioritizes efficiency and consistency where appropriate but always keeps in mind that those impacted when we make changes are the people in our Vermont communities.