



JRI Investments in Domestic Violence Accountability Programming
Joint Justice Oversight Committee, September 15th, 2022
Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director

Thank you for the opportunity to report to the Committee on Vermont's Justice Reinvestment Initiative investments in Domestic Violence Accountability Programming (DVAP).

Overview and History of Domestic Violence Accountability Funding

Domestic Violence Accountability Programming (DVAP), formerly known as “Batterer Intervention Programs”, is treatment which addresses the behavior of individuals who use violence against their intimate partners. Groups give participants an opportunity to replace tactics of coercive control with respect and nonviolence. DVAP is meant to be an essential part of a continuum of human service and criminal justice system interventions to domestic violence. While the programs do not serve as the sole vehicle for holding offenders accountable or changing behavior, accountability programming does serve as an essential component to our response to domestic violence and improving outcomes for both survivors and people who use violence.

Vermont used to have a robust system of domestic violence accountability, with programming offered at various risk levels in both incarcerative and community-based settings. In 2013, the Department of Corrections made changes to their treatment approaches which ended funding for DVAP by 2015. After analysis of charging and incarceration trends since funding was eliminated, the Justice Reinvestment Initiative I and Justice Reinvestment Initiative II both recommended that the state use JRI funds to reinstate robust support for DVAP.

As a result of these recommendations, funding was appropriated in the FY 2023 state budget. Currently, eleven community-based programs across Vermont are certified by the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence across Vermont and offer DVAP. These programs currently operate a combination of online, hybrid and in-person programming. In order to achieve certification, programs must undergo a rigorous process that assesses their alignment with statewide standards created by the Vermont Network and the national Center for Court Innovation. This review consists of document and policy review and interdisciplinary community review teams, including representatives of law enforcement, Vermont Network Member Organizations, the Department of Corrections, the Department for Children and Families, States Attorneys, among others.



FY 23 Investments in Domestic Violence Accountability Programming (DVAP)

In FY 23, a total of \$500,000 was awarded to support the statewide system of DVAP and to advance several important strategic objectives. Of the total award, approximately 70% of the funding has been allocated directly to domestic violence accountability providers in the field through a funding formula (detailed below). The remainder of the funding is being used for data collection and evaluation, statewide coordination of domestic violence accountability programming and developing culturally-specific programming. Funding is being used to advance the following objectives:

Funding Formula - Elimination of Participant Fees

The legislative language authorizing the FY23 investment required the elimination of participant fees for individuals participating in DVAP. Prior to this fiscal year, these programs were largely funded directly by the participants who were receiving treatment. It has been the Vermont Network's longtime position that funding DVAP programming based on participant fees is not sustainable, equitable or aligned with the goals of criminal justice reform efforts aimed at advancing alternatives to incarceration. In addition, local referral sources, such as the Department of Corrections field offices, frequently highlight fees as a barrier for participation and completion of programming, leading to continued involvement with the criminal justice system. Individuals adjudicated and mandated into programming are disproportionately people of color and/or individuals experiencing poverty. Frequently, individuals participating in programming are still living with or raising children with a survivor, and the financial stress of fees can further harm entire households who have experienced domestic violence.

As of October 1st, DVAP programs will no longer be charging participant fees. In order to accomplish this, a funding formula was devised to allocate funding among the certified programs. This formula utilizes a base funding level for each program with additional funding distributed based on the number of groups each program offers. This formula was devised by looking at how other states that provide funding to domestic violence accountability programs allocate resources and multiple listening sessions with providers in Vermont. Vermont is now among a small and growing cadre of jurisdictions eliminating participant fees for programming¹.

Currently, the available resources are just sufficient to ensure the existing eleven certified programs are sustainable without participant fees. As Vermont continues to expand offerings to meet the needs of communities and the demand of court re-openings, we run the risk of diffusing funding to the point where existing programs aren't sustainable without fees. We will be monitoring the impact of the

¹ Jurisdictions eliminating participant fees include New York City and Baltimore County, MD. L.A. County has completed a study on the barriers to participation posed by fees.



elimination of fees on providers throughout this year's implementation and look forward to continued conversations about adequate funding levels and sources.

Data Collection and Evaluation

Justice Reinvestment funding is being used to significantly improve data collection and evaluation of the effectiveness of DVAP. In calendar year 2023, in order to assess outcomes, DVAP providers will transition to a database platform to track data at the participant level, rather than the program level. Data collection and reporting is now a condition of funding for certified domestic violence accountability programs. Currently, programs report weekly on the number of attendees, program completions and/or dismissals and referral sources. In 2023, programs will track information in an encrypted database about each of the individual program participants, including detailed intake and referral information, completion rates and more. The Vermont Network is also working with the University of Nebraska to develop an evaluation framework to assess efficacy of programming and conduct a preliminary assessment on the impacts of eliminating fees.

Development of LGBTQ-Specific and Pilot Programming

One of the statutory mandates of this funding was to ensure the availability of domestic violence accountability programming for LGBTQ+ individuals. Programs that address the needs of people who use violence in LGBTQ+ relationships are very new in the field of domestic violence accountability. The Vermont Network is currently working with the Pride Center of Vermont, Outright VT, and Out in the Open to develop a strategy for supporting specific responses to domestic and intimate partner violence. In the interim period, up to three existing DVAPs have signified readiness to transition their group model to programming that is inclusive of all gender identities and/or sexual orientations. We will be working with the Center for Court Information, and the National LGBTQ+ Institute of Intimate Partner Violence for technical support during this transition.

The Vermont Network also continues to support pilot programming to meet population-specific needs in Vermont. This includes enhanced programming in the Northeast Kingdom, a program to address intimate partner violence in the migrant community, and programs such as Caring Dads of Bennington County, which is a nationally recognized curriculum program for parents who have caused harm to intimate partners.

Thank you for your time and continued support of Domestic Violence Accountability Programming.