

Community Justice Centers
House and Senate Appropriations Testimony – FY 2024 Budget
February 28, 2023

On behalf of Vermont’s 17 Community Justice Centers (CJCs), I am here to ask for your support for the Restorative Justice system in Vermont. For those of you not familiar with restorative justice, it is a collaborative, inclusive process that aims to build understanding, encourage accountability, and provide an opportunity to make things right when harm has happened. This approach serves to improve the well-being of communities by restoring peace and reducing the likelihood of repeated conflict and crime. We are proud to offer a range of services that offer alternative paths through our criminal legal system.

The 17 CJCs are funded in all or in part by the VT Dept. of Corrections to provide restorative and reentry services through referrals from our police departments, courts and Probation and Parole offices. We serve approximately 2,500 individuals each year in all 14 counties.

We have two budget priorities for FY 2024:

- 1. Victim Liaisons - dedicated victim services resources, in all 17 Vermont CJCs**
- 2. 3% increase each year over our FY 2023 appropriation.**

1. Victim Liasons - \$1,020,000

Victim centered services are a key component of community and restorative justice programs, yet we do not yet have the funding to provide these dedicated services throughout the state. Current staffing levels do not allow for adequate outreach to victims of crime. Some programs have received feedback that the support they provide to victims is inadequate or inferior to the support given to the people responsible for crime. There is a need for dedicated victim liaisons as a resource for victims.

2. 3% increase each year over our FY 2023 appropriation.

In FY 2023, CJCs received a COLA increase of 7% plus and additional \$5,000 for DEI work. In the FY 2024 budget, we are requesting that we build into our budget a 3% COLA increase each year going forward. For FY24, this will mean a \$3.28M allocation to the CJCs.

CJCs have been level-funded for the past several years, which impacts their ability to hire or retain staff. Level funding such a long period of time equates to cuts to our organizations, as our expenses continue to rise. Turnover of staff is financially costly to our organizations and challenges our ability to offer the kind of consistency and quality we all expect. Cost of living increases should not be an ‘extra’ to fight for, year after year, but instead should be a built-in standard, to reflect the reality of the costs of doing business.

Addison County Restorative Justice Services
Barre Community Justice Center
Bennington County Center for Restorative Justice
Brattleboro Community Justice Center at Windham County Youth Services
Burlington Community Justice Center
Essex Community Justice Center

Franklin Grand Isle Restorative Justice Center
Greater Falls Community Justice Center
Hartford Community Restorative Justice Center
Lamoille Restorative Center
Montpelier Community Justice Center
Orange County Restorative Justice Center
Orleans County Restorative Justice Center
South Burlington Community Justice Center
The Community Restorative Justice Center in St. Johnsbury
Williston Community Justice Center