



**Justice Involved Women Working Group Memo
House Corrections and Institutions
Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director
April 4th, 2023**

Thank you for the Committee's continued work and discussions to date about the future of the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility and programming for justice-involved women.

During your conversations on the Capital Bill, the Committee discussed the importance of a robust stakeholder process to inform conversations about the replacement of the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility and broader justice reform efforts. The Vermont Network believes that stakeholder engagement in these discussions is equally important to the design and planning decisions that are made. Today, we offer to the Committee a draft proposal to ensure that this planning process incorporates community input and also does not duplicate or limit existing efforts to engage stakeholders in discussion.

Since the late summer of 2022, the Department of Corrections has been convening a small working group to update stakeholders on the planning process for a replacement of the women's correctional facility. These meetings have been convened and facilitated by Kathy Astemborski, the Director of Women's Services for the Department of Corrections. Many other members of the Department of Corrections and Building and General Services staff and leadership have participated in these meetings. The Department of Corrections has invited providers who are currently contracted to provide services at the facility including the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Mercy Connections, Vermont Works for Women, and Lund to these meetings. Attendees have also included other organizations and advocacy groups including the Prisoners Rights Project and the ACLU of Vermont. Meetings to date have largely consisted of updates on the planning process, sharing design schematics and ample opportunity for questions and conversation. From the Vermont Network's perspective, the Department of Corrections has been transparent, inviting of feedback and fully collaborative in these discussions.

While these stakeholder conversations have been positive and productive, we believe that this group would benefit from being codified in statute to clarify its composition, charge and scope. This is especially important during the next several critical years while the Administration and the General Assembly will be making key decisions about the location, size, scope and programming of a potential replacement facility. Ensuring that each of these decisions points are well vetted and that stakeholder input is considered and incorporated will result in both an improved and transparent process and also a better outcome. In addition, ensuring that relevant committees of jurisdiction hear from both the Department and also from members of this working group will help ensure that the General Assembly is aware of these ongoing discussions and areas of consensus or disagreement. I have provided some draft language to the Committee for your consideration and would be more than happy to work with Committee members or other stakeholders to refine this language or a future draft if the Committee decides to move forward.