



**S.120: An Act Relating to Postsecondary Schools and Sexual Misconduct Protections
Selene Colburn, Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence**

Thank you for considering S. 120, an act relating to postsecondary schools and sexual misconduct protections.

The Vermont Network serves as the leading statewide voice on issues related to domestic and sexual violence. We represent 15 independent, non-profit Member Organizations who provide direct services to victims and survivors of violence in communities across Vermont – including many victims of campus sexual violence or dating violence. In 2023, our Member Organizations answered 23,300 hotline/chatline calls from individuals seeking support and provided in-person advocacy to 8,494 Vermonters.

For too many students in Vermont, their time in college also includes experiences of sexual assault or sexual harm. Women ages 18-24 are four times more likely than women of other ages to experience sexual violence. [1] The impacts of sexual assault on college campuses are disproportionate to other types of victimizations – for example, college-aged women are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted than robbed. [2] For these student survivors, sexual violence that is experienced in college often has detrimental and material impacts on their educational attainment, future earnings and their overall health and wellbeing. Despite the prevalence of campus sexual violence, only a very small number (estimated at less than 10%) of these cases are reported at all, and a smaller number still wind their way through campus judicial processes or criminal prosecution. [3]

S.120 includes important provisions that will improve the experience of students at Vermont's post-secondary institutions who are experiencing or at risk for sexual harm. It creates equitable, consistent standards for

- access to confidential sexual misconduct support services,
- amnesty policies that remove disincentives to reporting,
- and clear training guidelines for staff, faculty, and students.

Vermont is in good company with several other states, including many of our New England neighbors, in creating statewide policies on sexual misconduct to ensure consistency across postsecondary institutions. These policies serve as valuable accompaniments to federal regulations and guidelines.

S.120 reflect recommendations made by the Vermont Intercollegiate Sexual Harm Prevention Council, as well as significant work by stakeholders to reach agreement about how these recommendations can be operationalized. The Intercollegiate Council was created in 16 V.S.A. § 2187 to develop a coordinated response to campus sexual harm across

institutions of higher learning in Vermont. Membership includes students, campus Title IX coordinators, community-based organizations, criminal-legal system stakeholders, and health care professionals. Current law would allow the repeal of the Vermont Intercollegiate Sexual Harm Prevention Council in 2025; S.120 repeals this sunset and continues the life of the Council.

The Intercollegiate Council is an important multi-disciplinary team, addressing an issue that is of great concern in Vermont's post-secondary institutions and our culture at large. It's a unique space where the voices of impacted students are uplifted alongside those of subject matter experts and campus professionals. The agreement that was reached across these perspectives in S.120 is an excellent example of the value of the Council, and we urge the legislature to support its continuation. As passed by the Senate Education committee, the bill also included a modest annual appropriation for the Council, which is being considered by the Senate Appropriations committee for inclusion in the FY 2025 budget.

We strongly support S.120 as passed by the Senate and value the collaboration with the University of Vermont, the Vermont State Colleges, and the Association of Vermont Independent Colleges that led to agreement about the language before you.

¹ Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995-2013 (2014).

² National Crime Victimization Survey, 1995-2013 (2015); ii. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995-2013 (2014).

³ Cullen, F., Fisher, B., & Turner, M., The sexual victimization of college women (NCJ 182369). (2000). Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>
