



H. 694 - An act relating to sexual exploitation

Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director

February 20, 2024

Thank you for the Committee's attention to H. 694, an act relating to sexual exploitation. On behalf of the Vermont Network and the 15 Member Organizations that provide direct services to victims of domestic and sexual violence, we support H. 694.

This bill proposes to modify the sexual conduct included in Vermont statutes which protect children and individuals under the supervision of the Department of Corrections. The proposed language expands the prohibited conduct beyond a "sexual act" to sexual conduct as defined in 13 V.S.A § 2821.

The forms of sexual exploitation addressed in this bill represent instances in which an individual takes advantage of their position of power over a more vulnerable individual. It is important that Vermont law reflect the full range of conduct that may be present in these instances of exploitation. Sexual conduct as defined in 13 V.S.A § 2821 is a more expansive and accurate definition of the kinds of conduct that is part of these forms of exploitation.

In addition, the change proposed in H. 694 is an important step in Vermont's ongoing efforts to protect its most vulnerable citizens, including incarcerated Vermonters. Last year, the General Assembly passed Act 46. Under this law, sexual exploitation by law enforcement professionals is prohibited under the more expansive definition of sexual conduct as defined in 13 V.S.A § 2821 and codified for law enforcement in 13 V.S.A § 3259. Act 46 did not address individuals under the supervision of the Department of Corrections. This proposal ensures that individuals under the supervision of the Department of Corrections have access to the same levels of protections as those interacting with law enforcement professionals.

Please feel free to contact us with any additional questions.