



S. 14 – Justice Reinvestment Performance Data and Reporting

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Thank you for the invitation to speak with the committee today about S. 14. We support this bill as an important effort to advance and measure the aims of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

Domestic Violence Accountability

Vermont’s Justice Reinvestment Initiative I and Justice Reinvestment Initiative II (JRI) both recommended that the state use JRI funds to reinstate robust support for domestic violence accountability programming. These recommendations were the result of robust data analysis by the Center for State Governments, which demonstrated the disproportionate impact that domestic violence has on our criminal legal system. According to the Center for State Governments, one quarter of all people sentenced to prison in Vermont between 2016-2020 were convicted of a domestic violence-related crime.

Domestic Violence Accountability Programs (DVAPs), formerly known as “Batterer Intervention Programs”, provide treatment to individuals who use violence against their intimate partners. Groups give participants an opportunity to replace tactics of coercive control with respect and nonviolence. DVAPs are meant to be part of the continuum of human services and criminal justice system interventions to domestic violence. While they do not serve as the sole vehicle for holding offenders accountable or changing behavior, treatment serves an essential component to our responses and improving outcomes for both survivors and people who use violence.

Currently, there are ten programs across Vermont certified by the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence. In order to achieve certification, programs must undergo a rigorous process that assesses their alignment with statewide standards. Certification involves document and policy review by interdisciplinary community review teams including representatives of law enforcement, Vermont Network Member Organizations, the Department of Corrections, the Department for Children and Families and States Attorneys among others.

JRI Investments in Domestic Violence Accountability Programming (DVAP)

The initial JRI investments in DVAP started out at \$200,000 in FY 2022. In FY 2023, a total of \$500,000 was appropriated. Per the recommendation of the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee, the anticipated appropriation in FY 2024 will be \$850,000. The additional \$350,000 was appropriated in the FY 23 Budget Adjustment Act to be used in FY 2024.

The majority of these funds flow directly to Vermont’s Certified DVAP programs via a funding formula. Prior to October 1, 2022, DVAP programs were largely funded directly by participants 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. Due to language in the FY 2023 budget, programs are no longer permitted to charge any fees to participants.



Domestic Violence Accountability Data and Evaluation

Due to JRI funding, Vermont is now - for the first time - prepared to measure the impact and efficacy of community-based domestic violence accountability treatment. You will find a data reporting requirement related to this on page 5 of S. 14, subsection H (i). The Vermont Council on Domestic Violence currently tracks weekly information about Vermont's certified DVAPs, including attendance numbers, numbers and sources of program referrals, numbers of participants who complete programming, numbers of participants who are dismissed from programming, and the criminal offenses and/or civil orders associated with these referrals. However, we seek to evaluate not only participant demographics, count and completion – but the outcomes of programming.

Using JRI funding, the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence has contracted with a research team from the University of Nebraska Lincoln to develop an evaluation framework to measure the impacts of Vermont's DVAPs in greater detail and to provide outcome data. The University of Nebraska has worked to develop a logic model analysis, which demonstrates the relationships between a given intervention (input) and a result (output). Researchers are now finalizing outcome measurements which include both quantitative and qualitative data measures that will be collected at the participant level by domestic violence treatment programs. These outcomes will be used to measure the efficacy of domestic violence treatment programs, including measuring evidence of desistance, compliance with criminal legal system requirements, demonstration of responsibility for actions and self-accountability, improved community and peer supports and additional behavior changes.

JRI Funding has also allowed the community-based DVAPs to have access to a shared, uniform database to track detailed data about participants and their progression through programming. Historically, much of the national research on domestic violence accountability programming is narrowly focused on measuring only recidivism rates. While this is an important metric, we are eager to share a more complete picture of the impact of Vermont's efforts and look forward to the reporting proposed in this bill as an opportunity to do so.

Next Steps

In order to report the data requested in S. 14, DVAPs must be funded at the same level moving forward. S. 14 is closely connected to the State's process for making strategic and data driven investments in community-based services, which advance the aims of JRI. As we testified earlier this week, we urge the General Assembly to maintain its commitment to funding community-based services which achieve the aims of JRI and determining a sustainable and improved process moving forward for allocating these investments.