

February 28, 2023

Dear House and Senate Appropriation Committees,

I am proud to work at one of Vermont's Community Justice Centers, representing an investment in non-punitive methods of supporting accountability, repair of relationships and enhancing public safety. Collectively, 24 agencies receive funding from the Department for Children and Families, the Attorney General's Office, the Department of Corrections and the VT Center for Crime Victim Services to use restorative practices to address harm and crime. Our approach is based on the philosophy that crime is, first and foremost, a violation of relationships. Through voluntary engagement of the parties directly involved in the harm, and addressing the impacts of the crime—on the victim, the person/people responsible, and the community in which the harm happened—and seeking repair, community bonds are strengthened and the public is safer because of it.

To rise to its potential, restorative justice needs to offer dedicated services to the impacted parties, or victims. All of our primary funders, with the exception of the Center for Crime Victim Services, are focused on the defendants, or responsible parties. Despite our best intentions, we are not serving victims adequately. Most of our funding has been level funded, equating to annual cuts, for years. Some of our funding, from the federal Victims of Crime Act, is diminishing and its future is uncertain. To date, only six of the 24 agencies receive dedicated funding for victims, totaling \$340,650 (through the VOCA funding), and amazingly, serving 1307 victims through 10,000 hours of staff time (during SFY 22). This equates to about 4.8 FTE, which for a state-funded restorative justice system of \$7 million, is embarrassingly low.

When geographic justice is a concern for so many, the fact that victims in Chittenden County, for example, have more resources and options than victims in Orleans or Bennington Counties, is not fair or equitable. We propose the visionary investment in expansive and creative solutions for our public safety system. Through a total investment of **\$1,151,000 to the Center for Crime Victim Services**, each of our 24 agencies could provide dedicated victim services for fair and equitable restorative processes, through referrals from both the community and the criminal legal system. Given that only 42% of violent crimes and 40% of property crimes are reported to law enforcement (per the US Dept. of Justice's Vision 21 Strategic Plan), resourcing alternative paths for harmed parties is essential.

Thank you for your attention. I'm happy to answer questions regarding the finances behind this request, or others that you might have.

Sincerely,

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