

To: Robin Scheu, Chair of House Appropriations Committee
Fr: Martin LaLonde, Chair of House Judiciary Committee

Re: Budget Adjustment Act

The House Judiciary Committee has reviewed information that Representative Trevor Squirrell provided to our committee related to the recommendations of the Administration regarding the Budget Adjustment Act. The Judiciary Committee supports the administration's recommendations.

In addition, we understand that your committee is considering whether to repeal the sunset of an increase in the marriage license fee implemented last biennium. The increase in the fee was intended to help cover shortfalls in the special fund used to address domestic and sexual violence. The increased fee raises approximately \$70,000 per year to fund the critical work of supporting victims of domestic and sexual violence. The Judiciary Committee supports removal of the sunset.

Further, we understand that the Office of the Attorney General has requested the addition of a classified permanent position in support of the pre-charge diversion program contemplated in Act 180 (2024). The OAG does not seek funding added to the BAA for that position. In testimony over the past two weeks, witnesses have emphasized the importance of implementing the pre-charge diversion program. The program builds upon the already-successful pre-charge diversion occurring in some counties to provide this vital service statewide. Pre-charge diversion ensures swifter accountability when individuals commit certain offenses, allows additional victim voice in resolving offenses through a restorative process, and collects important data on the use of pre-charge diversion. Of primary importance, increasing pre-charge diversion will ease pressures on the court system as it works to address the backlog of cases. It is critical that the OAG obtain the additional position to help establish this program.

It is important to add this position in the BAA, even without funding, so that the work can start as soon as possible. The OAG has shared that if they are able to fill the position before July 1st (when their funding request in the Big Bill begins) they have some resources to cover the position for that short period of time. Starting the position as soon as possible will allow Vermont to benefit from pre-charge diversion in a timely manner.