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**MEMORANDUM**

To: House Committee on Appropriations  
From: House Committee on Judiciary  
Date: February 24, 2026  
Subject: Judiciary Committee Budget Memo

The Judiciary Committee has heard from the entities relevant to the Committee's work. After discussion, we placed the budget requests in two tiers. Tier one includes those requests that we understand from the requesters are critical to fulfill their ongoing functions. Tier two includes those requests that are less critical, but would advance the work of the requesters.

The requests in each tier are in alphabetical order. The Committee did not set priorities within the tiers.

**TIER ONE**

**Criminal Justice Council**

The Criminal Justice Council is not requesting funds beyond the administration's proposed budget. We recognize that there are budget pressures that will need to be addressed in the future, including for ongoing implementation of de-escalation training, but the Council did not recommend additional funding beyond that proposal.

**Department of States Attorneys and Sheriffs**

States Attorneys offices have been making significant progress in reducing the court backlog of criminal cases, which, in turn, leads to faster and more certain consequences for criminal behavior. This progress is jeopardized by the proposed vacancy savings target in the administration's proposed budget. DSAS requests as its top priority (and we concur), elimination of vacancy savings of \$330,392 for States Attorneys.

To expeditiously move cases through the criminal justice process, it is important that detained offenders are brought to court hearings. This requires transport deputies, which are funded through DSAS. DSAS requests the elimination of vacancy savings of \$139,235 for the transport deputies.

Finally, the work of victim advocates in States Attorneys offices is critical. DSAS requests the elimination of vacancy savings of \$147,470 for their victim advocates.

## **Extension of Accountability Dockets**

We understand that the administration's budget proposal includes \$500,000 for continuation and expansion of the successful accountability docket that was piloted in Chittenden County. The court, States Attorney, defense counsel, and administration are currently planning on having a similar effort starting in Rutland County. Although the \$500,000 is not yet specifically allocated, we understand the need for flexibility in the use of these funds and fully support the expansion of the accountability docket approach.

We also understand that the administration's proposed budget includes \$1.2 or \$1.4 million for the expansion of pretrial supervision. We have concerns with having all of those funds used for that program, but support the use of those funds for DOC's liaison role in the accountability dockets as well as some of the funds used for the pretrial supervision program. We understand that the issue of how best to use these funds is still under discussion in Corrections and Institutions.

## **Human Rights Commission**

To support the Commission's important work in advancing civil and human rights in Vermont, the vacancy savings of \$65,000 should be eliminated in the FY27 budget. To absorb those savings would require the Commission to reduce its operations and already limited number of staff.

## **Legal Aid**

Vermont Legal Aid has suffered significant losses of federal funding that supports its Poverty Law Project. In addition, funding for other services of Legal Aid have been level- and under-funded. To appropriately fund the Poverty Law Project, the Immigrant Minor Guardianship Project, and the Statewide Legal Helpline, we support Legal Aid's request for \$885,620 above the administration's recommended budget for the organization. That request breaks down as follows:

Inflationary increase to budget (This is equivalent to the annual 3% increase that the administration has set for state agency increases in the last few years. Legal Aid did not get that increase) - \$235,620;

2 FTE attorneys/staff for the Poverty Law Project - \$300,000

Statewide Legal Helpline Funding - \$200,000

Immigrant Minor Guardianship Project - \$150,000

## **Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**

The Vermont Network is a critical advocate for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The 15 independent, non-profit organization members of the Network have been largely flat funded through Vermont's Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund for the past 15 years. The Fund has two sources - a surcharge on civil and criminal court judgments and a surcharge on marriage licenses. These revenue sources have had significant declines resulting in annual deficits in the Fund. Last year, the legislature appropriated \$450,000 in one-time money for the Fund to address the deficit. The problems with the Fund have not gone away and this year, to address the current deficit and in future years, the Network requests \$450,000 in base funds going to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund.. This would level fund the critical domestic and sexual violence services provided by Network members. Without these funds, programming will be cut as of July 1st.

## **Office of the Attorney General**

The Attorney General's budget request is consistent with the administration's proposed FY27 budget with two exceptions. In our tier one prioritization, we support the conversion of a limited-service position to a permanent position for the Assistant Director of Court Diversion and Pre-Trial Services. (See below for tier two prioritization of the second exception).

## **Office of the Defender General**

To fulfill its functions of providing constitutionally-required defense services to indigent criminal defendants, the Office of Defender General requires the following funds not included in the administration's proposed budget.

Case-related expenditures (experts, investigators, transcripts, etc.) - \$250,000  
Attorney Conflict Contracts - \$250,000  
In-person training - \$80,000

## **Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services**

The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services is seeking an additional \$102,729.70 in GFs to support the grants and financial oversight and technical assistance that it provides for victim services programming in Vermont. The Center administers grants to over 60 subgrantees throughout the state; this amount represents 5% of the \$2,054,594 that the Center receives in GF dollars to administer 39 individual subgrants. The GF grant funding has always been handled as straight pass-through dollars, meaning the Center has never received support for its work. With declining special and federal funds, the Center's administration can no longer continue to manage the administrative and operational responsibilities necessary for it to perform its role without a modest increased appropriation to its GF.

## **Vermont State Courts**

The 26 court positions that the legislature added in FY24 have been critical for reducing the court case backlog, which, in turn, leads to faster and more certain consequences for criminal behavior. Swift and certain consequences are critical for deterring crime. The positions added in FY24 were limited-service. It has become clear that for more efficient court processing these positions should be made permanent. The positions include one database administrator, two IT Help Desk Analysts, two Centralized Service Analysts, ten Judicial Assistants, and eleven Judicial Officer IIs.

The Court is also requesting that the FY27 budget cover the increased cost of sheriffs who provide security in the courts. Without this service, courts cannot hear cases. The sheriffs have requested in their FY27 budget that the Judiciary rate equals the Executive Branch contract rate of \$75.00 per hour. Their current rate is \$57.00, although the budget in the last two years has budgeted for a \$53.00 rate. The difference has been covered in the BAA. To go to the \$57.00 rate requires an additional approximately \$600,000 increase in the base budget. To go to a \$75.00 rate would cost an approximate \$1.3 million increase. Overall the ask is \$1,929,637 The administration's proposed budget does not include this increase.

## **TIER TWO**

### **Department of States Attorneys and Sheriffs**

States Attorney offices are facing increasing costs of prosecuting cases. DSAS requests an increase of \$100,000 for operating expenses to cover such costs as expert witness fees, transcripts, extraditions, and training.

DSAS also requests additional staff, including 6 administrative professionals / legal assistants to assist in managing the heavy caseloads of existing staff.

DSAS also requests four additional victim advocates. Currently the advocates staff on average 600 cases, which may have multiple victims. To provide appropriate victim services, additional staff is required.

### **Human Rights Commission**

The Commission has been historically understaffed and under-resourced, leading to delayed case processing, a high number of declined investigations, backlog of complaints, and staff burnout and turnover. The legislature created two new positions in FY26 (a staff attorney investigator and an intake coordinator), but this was only a portion of what the Commission needed to meet the needs of Vermonters at present. The following additional staff are required to fulfill the function of the Commission in advancing civil and human rights in Vermont: New Policy Director Position - \$130,000; New Staff Attorney Investigator Position - \$130,000; New Paralegal Position - \$108,000.

### **Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**

The Network requests \$717,750 for a statewide system of supervised visitation programs. The programs provide safe, structured settings where parents have monitored time with their children. This request would fund community-based visitation services plus statewide coordination of services.

### **Office of the Attorney General**

The Attorney General's budget request is consistent with the administration's proposed FY27 budget with two exceptions. In our tier two prioritization, we support the request for \$85,000 in base funding for the Home Improvement Specialist Position within the AG's Consumer Assistance Program.

### **Office of the Defender General**

The Office of Defender General has the following additional requests:

Public Defender Special Fund Shortfall - \$290,000

Unrealistic Vacancy Savings - \$310,000

### **Vermont State Courts**

Moved from Tier 1: To assist users of the courts technology and applications (including the Enterprise Justice E-Filing and Case Management System and the Vermont Digital Evidence Portal), the courts need an additional IT helpdesk analyst. The current two

positions are insufficient given the high volume of requests for assistance. The estimated cost is \$92,471.

Mental Health and the Courts Project Director - \$88,000. This position has been grant-funded, but it is not clear that the court will receive an additional grant. The contracted position assists the court's Judiciary Commission on Mental Health and the Courts, which examines the interactions between the judicial and mental health systems to propose measures to better respond to the needs of court-involved individuals with mental health issues.

The courts face high turnover of staff, which in turn requires ongoing training resources. To increase training availability and to improve the training provided, the court seeks to add four judicial assistants dedicated to training. The need is greatest for the criminal docket, so adding one judicial assistant for that docket would be a priority. The cost of four judicial assistants is \$430,776.