

January 26, 2026

Vermont House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
Chair Michael Marcotte
Room 35, Vermont State House
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Chair Marcotte and Members of the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee,

We write to express our strong support for comprehensive, clear, and accessible protections for victims of coerced debt, such as those proposed in H.385. These measures promote safety for victims and the integrity of our financial system.

Coerced debt is a form of economic abuse used to undermine a victim's personal and economic independence. It occurs when a perpetrator uses coercive control, threats, fraud, or identity theft to incur debt in someone else's name.

Coerced debt affects survivors of domestic violence and trafficking, vulnerable older adults, and at-risk youth and children involved in the foster system. Its consequences can devastate a survivor's finances—destroying credit, limiting access to housing, education, and employment, and forcing survivors to choose between paying debts they aren't responsible for and meeting their basic needs.

The impacts of coerced debt are significant and long-lasting. Yet current consumer protection laws leave survivors without clear avenues to dispute coerced debts and rebuild their economic stability. Without relief, survivors' financial futures are defined by the actions of those who harmed them.

We urge the committee to advance H.385 to provide meaningful protections to survivors of abuse and give them the tools they need to move forward.

Sincerely,

Atria Collective

AWARE Inc.

Capstone Community Action

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)

Circle

Clarina Howard Nichols Center

Connecting Cultures/ New England Survivors of Torture and Trauma

Green Mountain United Way

H.O.P.E. Works

Housing & Homeless Alliance of Vermont (HHAV)

Hunger Free Vermont

Mosaic VT

NEKCA (Northeast Kingdom Community Action)

NEKCOA (Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging)

NewStory Center

PAVE (Project Against Violent Encounters)

Safeline, Inc.

SafeSpace Anti-Violence Program

Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)

Steps to End Domestic Violence

Umbrella

United Way of Lamoille County

United Ways of Vermont / VT 211

Vermont Aging Network Consortium

Vermont Center for Independent Living

Vermont Commission on Women

Vermont Legal Aid

Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Vermont Parent Child Center Network

Voices Against Violence – CVOEO

Voices for Vermont's Children

WISE

Women's Freedom Center