



**Women's Facility Stakeholder Group  
House Corrections and Institutions Committee  
Sarah Robinson, Co-Executive Director  
April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

***Background***

For over 20 years, the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence has operated a statewide direct services program (DIVAS) for incarcerated survivors of domestic and sexual violence out of the women's correctional facility in Vermont. Through a contract with the Department of Corrections (DOC), DIVAS provides in-person, trauma informed advocacy and support to incarcerated women who are victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and trafficking.

The vast majority of incarcerated women have experienced some form of interpersonal trauma, including domestic and sexual violence, prior to their incarceration. Many incarcerated women cite their victimization as a contributing factor in their incarceration. In November of 2024, our DIVAS program collected data from residents at CRCF about their past experiences of interpersonal trauma. Of those surveyed, 97% indicated that they had previously experienced or witnessed domestic violence and 82% had previously experienced or witnessed sexual violence including 79% indicating that they had experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. In addition, 62% indicated that they have experienced forced criminality when they were forced, lied to, or pressured to engage in illegal or sexual activities in exchange for money, housing, substances or basic needs.

As a result of our work, the Vermont Network has been deeply involved in policy conversations about services for justice-involved women in Vermont, including replacing Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility.

***Women's Facility Stakeholder Group***

The Vermont Network is an active participant in the Women's Facility Stakeholder Group, facilitated by DOC. This is a group that is not established in statute. However, this committee authored a letter of intent to the Department of Corrections regarding engaging stakeholders regularly in the development and planning of a new women's correctional facility. We appreciate the attention and work DOC has dedicated to it as well as the robust participation of stakeholders with varying perspectives. The venue for dialogue and updates outside of the legislative process is valuable.

The stakeholder group includes a wide range of perspectives, including those of providers, policymakers, advocates, organizations opposed to building any new facility, and DOC staff. Meetings have provided an opportunity for stakeholders to hear updates about project planning. The conversations in the stakeholder group are not always easy and are

sometimes contentious. Despite this, we believe that dialogue itself continues to be a worth and necessary part of the process.

The Vermont Network believes Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility needs to be replaced. The current facility is not a healthy place to live or work. Conceptually, we support DOC's vision for a replacement facility and its proposed building site in the town of Essex. However, many important policy and design decisions have yet to be made which will impact the Network's position on the final project.

### ***Priority Issues for a New Women's Facility***

Stakeholders overwhelmingly agree justice-involved women in Vermont deserve a robust system of support, rehabilitation, and healing. At the Vermont Network, we have prioritized work in the following areas to support of that goal:

- We believe Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility needs to be replaced. The facility itself is not conducive to rehabilitation or the provision of programming. It is an unhealthy place for people to live and work. **We support developing a new, smaller, and gender-responsive women's correctional facility. The facility must offer best-practice programming to support healing and reentry. Without commensurate investments in re-entry and community-based services by both the legislature and the Administration, the policy goals of a new facility will not be realized.**
- The proposed facility, inspired by a model developed in Maine, includes both a secure facility and a re-entry facility. We have discussed this model in depth and believe it holds promise, *if* used to reduce Vermont's overall reliance on incarceration and support justice-involved women's successful re-entry. **The re-entry facility – and its eligibility criteria – must be designed to maximize placement in a re-entry facility** and access to programming provided there. This may include future policy discussions about detainees.
- **The programming and services provided at a new correctional facility should inform the foundational components of its design.** Vermont must ensure that justice-involved women are provided adequate resources and continuity in services from the facility to community. **Funding providers to offer services both inside and outside the facility provides a re-entry bridge** and contributes to the continuity of services and supports for women after they are released.
- **Finally, we believe that a replacement facility should be located in proximity to both community-based services and the current correctional and contractor workforce. This with ensure access to** transportation, housing, treatment, and employment options to support individuals during re-entry. Currently, approximately one-third of Vermont's justice-involved women live in Chittenden County and these individuals will be released back to their local community. We support DOC's work to secure a site for a new facility in the town of Essex.