

The Vermont Racial Justice Alliance (VRJA) is in support of the act related to establishing a community health center pilot program (H.184). VRJA has conducted a number of listening sessions to inform racial justice public policy. These listening sessions have largely focussed on economic justice, racism: public health emergency, equal protection of the law, reparations, oversight of law enforcement and community health and wellness. These sessions, designated “outreach and education”, approached all topics through the lens of systemic racism and offered an overview of root causes and impact. Each session was interactive and connected the issue to community action and policy. Over 75 people attended these sessions.

The VRJA initiated a campaign in conjunction with our outreach and education activities, in an effort to elevate the concept of community health and wellness. Through discussions on the use of grass roots efforts such as such as peer support, VRJA has created a strategy to engage in youth mental health first aid and suicide prevention programmings. VRJA has initiated work on the implementation of a community-based youth and young adult intervention program where rehabilitated justice-impaired folks provide direction, inspiration and support for those who are at risk. “Credible Messenger” is a widely acclaimed data-driven results-based movement that has revolutionized the work of prevention and harm reduction and reduced recidivism exponentially nationally.

VRJA has engaged in discovery through association with Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Racial Disparities in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Advisory Panel (RDAP), Burlington School District, the Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office the Council for Equitable Youth Justice A Burlington Collaborative on Youth Gun Violence, United Way Mental Health Initiative, Prevention Network and others. Our discussions have been productive in establishing consensus on the fact that Black youth are being disparately adversely impacted by the juvenile and criminal justice system. This includes removal rates of youth from their homes.

The VRJA data team has analyzed some of the data related to these challenges. Some of the initiatives that the VRJA are contemplating include the expansion of new programs and services in partnership with the Richard Kemp Center, programmatic school visits, college intern collaborations and potential expansion of the Credible Messenger initiative.

VRJA has been involved in several hundred hours of community, partner and community discussions and our data team has invested over 60 hours of research. Two to three initiatives are emerging from this work. It is our hope the establishment of this pilot program would provide VRJA and other community based organizations to continue to do this type of work in our communities. We'd be happy to offer testimony in support of H.184.

Respectfully,

Rev. Mark Hughes
Executive Director
[Vermont Racial Justice Alliance](#)