



Supervised Visitation Report – Act 27 of 2025

Charlie Gliserman, Policy Director

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee today about supervised visitation in Vermont, including the Supervised Visitation Report requested in Act 27 of 2025.

OVERVIEW OF SUPERVISED VISITATION

Supervised visitation provides a safe, structured setting where a parent can have monitored time with their child. Courts and the Department for Children and Families (DCF) often order supervised visitation in situations where safety concerns exist for a child or a non-abusive parent. This includes many cases of domestic violence.

Trained staff ensure visits occur in a safe, supportive, and trauma-informed environment. Many programs also offer supervised custodial exchange, allowing children to move safely between parents without exposing the non-abusive parent to risk.

At their core, supervised visitation services are designed to serve children and help foster safe relationships between them and their parents. Each visit is centered on a child's needs, sense of safety, and capacity for connection.

These services also play a critical role in protecting the safety of the non-abusive parent. Research consistently shows that abuse frequently escalates after separation. Custody or visitation arrangements often necessitate ongoing contact with an abusive partner, creating safety risks and disrupting a survivor's healing.

Supervised visitation provides a safe alternative. It allows a non-custodial parent to maintain or build a healthy relationship with their child within a structured, supportive setting.

CURRENT STATUS OF SUPERVISED VISTATION IN VERMONT

Supervised visitation programs have been chronically underfunded for more than 15 years, leading to program closures and significant service gaps.

Currently, each program receives a very small grant from DCF, and some also receive supplemental support from the Center for Crime Victim Services. Together, these grants amount to **approximately \$16,000 to \$40,000 per program annually – far below what is needed to sustain safe, reliable services.**

Today, six independent nonprofit centers operate in Vermont, leaving five counties – Lamoille, Orange, Washington, Windsor, and Rutland – without a local program. These counties are clustered in the center of the state, creating a "desert" where families have limited access to essential services.

As a result, **families often must travel long distances, forgo visits, or rely on untrained family members or friends to supervise contact – arrangements that may pose safety risks.** Witnesses later in this hearing will share how these barriers — including being ordered by the court or DCF to rely on informal supervision arrangements — harm Vermont families.

Even in counties with programs, long waiting lists – sometimes several months to a year – make it difficult for families to comply with court or DCF orders.

The Vermont Network provides statewide support to supervised visitation programs, offering technical assistance, training, and opportunities for collaboration and communication among providers. It has also established practice standards to ensure consistent, high-quality services across the state.

SUPERVISED VISITATION REPORT & FUNDING NEEDS FOR FY27

Last year, lawmakers – including this committee – asked the Commissioner of DCF and the Chief Superior Judge to develop a proposal for sustainably funding a statewide system of supervised visitation programs. Their report was produced in consultation with the Center for Crime Victim Services, supervised visitation programs, and the Vermont Network.

We thank the legislature, DCF, and the Judiciary for giving this issue the time and attention it deserves.

The report outlines the significant challenges facing supervised visitation programs and the conditions that led to them. It clearly identifies insufficient funding as a primary barrier to ensuring consistent services statewide.

The report calls for:

- Sustainable funding for statewide coordination to ensure programs operate with standardized, high-quality practices.
- Sustainable funding for supervised visitation programs themselves to meet statewide demand, including resources to:
 - Sustain coverage of services statewide
 - Attract, retain, and train qualified staff
 - Provide appropriate space for visits and exchanges

The report also recognizes the need for a more detailed cost analysis. **The Vermont Network has conducted preliminary assessments of program funding needs and would welcome the opportunity to work with DCF and the Judiciary to return to the committee with a detailed cost estimate in the coming weeks.**

With supervised visitation services at a breaking point, this work is timely. **It is critical that additional funding becomes available by July 1, 2026, to prevent further program closures and ensure that Vermont families can access these essential services.**

Thank you for your time and early consideration of this report. It is a privilege to be followed today by two survivors who can speak firsthand to the importance of accessible supervised visitation for their families. Before that, I would be happy to answer any questions.