



City Circle Pre-Charge Diversion Pilot Program

Burlington Community Justice Center (CJC)

Purpose

City Circle offers a restorative justice alternative for low-level ordinance violations by bringing people together in facilitated community meetings to address harm, build accountability, and prevent future violations. This approach reduces reliance on formal court processes while increasing safety, repair, and connection for those affected.

City Circle is part of the Burlington Community Justice Center's existing Pre-Charge Diversion Program and operates in partnership with the Burlington Police Department, the Vermont Attorney General's Office, the Chittenden County State's Attorney, the City Attorney's Office, and the City's Church Street Marketplace.

The goal is to hold the first City Circle on **Monday, January 5th**.

Program Components

Restorative Justice

The program centers on restorative justice practices, which focus on acknowledging harm, fostering accountability, and repairing damage rather than relying on punitive systems.

Community Engagement

Community members who are trained volunteers participate in facilitated circles with individuals referred to the program. Victims may participate when appropriate and if they choose to.

Voluntary Program

Participation is entirely voluntary. Declining referral does not result in additional penalties. The case simply returns to the traditional legal process through the Burlington Police Department and City Attorney's Office.



Addressing Repeat Offenses

City Circle prioritizes early intervention to prevent cycles of repeated violations that affect public safety and community trust.

Alternative to Court

Rather than automatic court involvement for minor violations, individuals can participate in City Circle to resolve eligible tickets meaningfully.

Victim Connection and Support

CJC staff reach out to victims to offer support, resources, and assistance with navigating any uninsured losses. Victims choose if, when, and how to engage. Participation is never required.

Expected Timeline

Most cases are resolved within **30–60 days**, depending on service connections and agreement requirements.

City Circle Values

- Accountability without shame
- Repair over punishment
- Community participation
- Victim dignity and choice
- Early intervention
- Transparency and fairness
- Harm isn't created in a vacuum



Eligible Offenses

Eligible incidents may include:

- Public urination/defecation
- Noise disturbances
- Littering
- Graffiti
- Defacement of property
- Disorderly conduct
- Public use of alcohol or cannabis
- Public illegal drug use
- Disturbing monuments or markers
- Unleashed animals
- Smoking in non-smoking areas
- Skateboards, bicycles, e-bikes or motorized vehicles on sidewalks and on the Church Street Marketplace
- City Hall Park / Church Street violations
- Unlawful trespass
- Unlawful mischief

Eligibility Determination

Final eligibility is determined collaboratively by the Burlington Police Department, City Attorney's Office, and CJC staff.

Referral Pathway

Incident occurs → Ticket/Complaint issued → Referral to City Circle → Intake & readiness screening → City Circle meeting → Agreement → Service connection → Case closure or referral for prosecution

Roles and Responsibilities

Law Enforcement

- Issue ticket/complaint with brief narrative
- Provide victim name and contact information when applicable
- Give referral card (need translated cards)
- Refer eligible cases, ticketing process: The person should only receive the pink copy of the ticket along with the City Circle card. BPD retains the yellow copy. The remainder of the ticket is placed in a box on the Uniform Bureau Support and Administration Coordinator's desk. CJC staff will pick up tickets every Monday morning. If the person completes successfully, the CJC will void the ticket and mail to the VJB. If the person



fails or does not appear, the ticket is given to the City Attorney's office for consideration for prosecution. If the person attends City Circle and completes all conditions of the program, the violation is voided, and no penalty will be imposed. If the person fails to attend City Circle within 30 days or fails to complete all conditions of the program, the ticket for this violation will be issued. At that time, the City Attorney's office elevates the violation to a criminal charge.

- Communicate about referrals, case status, returns, concerns, etc.
- Attend City Circle when appropriate as witnesses or community participants, not as prosecutors

City Attorney's Office

- Consult as needed
- Receive returned cases when participation is declined or agreements are not completed
- Determine prosecution when appropriate

Community Justice Center Staff

- Pick up tickets from records at BPD, each Monday
- Conduct intake and readiness screening
- Facilitate City Circles
- Support victims and those referred
- Train and supervise volunteers
- Coordinate services
- Track completion
- Report outcomes

Volunteers

- Complete application, background check, sign NDAs, attend interview, and training
- Participate in City Circles
- Maintain confidentiality
- Receive supervision, debriefing, and emotional support

Accommodation



- Language access and interpretation
- Cultural advocates and support people

Participation Readiness & Safety Review

Before placement, CJC staff conduct screening for:

- Readiness to participate
- Emotional and cognitive capacity
- Risk of harm
- Appropriateness for circle process

Referrals involving credible threats, severe impairment, or ongoing violence may be redirected to individual processes or returned to the City Attorney's Office.

Stage-Based Process

Stage One

Participant Intake & Readiness Review

Staff meets with potential participant for orientation to rights, responsibilities, and expectations. Staff gauges readiness. Signs of readiness include willingness to acknowledge harm and take responsibility. Not everyone is ready to accept responsibility at an initial meeting, they may need more time. If a person is not ready at the first meeting with BCJC, staff will schedule a follow-up meeting within a week to build rapport and further explore accountability in support of readiness. If the participant is ready and agrees to participate and acknowledges some responsibility, they complete the initial agreement paperwork and proceed to City Circle.

If a person referred does not appear/contact BCJC and we cannot locate them within 30 days, BCJC will return the case.

Victim Outreach

Victims are contacted within five business days or sooner whenever possible. Victims determine their level of involvement, which may include written communication, requests, or facilitated meetings.



Stage Two

Meet in Circle

Participants, volunteers, and staff meet to talk about what happened, who was impacted, and how to make things as right as possible. Officers and victims may attend depending on the case. Together, they create a restorative agreement. Sometimes, participants are able to talk through the restorative questions and decide on the agreement in one circle meeting. Other times, they will get part-way through these elements and decide to come back next week to finish the conversation. If circle participation is not safe or appropriate, individual formats may be used. If mental health or substance use needs are identified, service connections are included in the agreement.

Stage Three

Follow-Up & Completion

Participants return to Circle, or the case is closed after fulfilling the agreement.

Closing the case – successful completion:

- BCJC voids the ticket and sends to the Vermont Judicial Bureau.
- Sends completion notice to BPD and City Attorney's Office.

Closing the case – unsuccessful completion:

- BCJC delivers ticket to City Attorney's Office with a copy of the Pre-Charge Diversion return notice

Successful Process

- Referral issued
- Intake completed
- Circle attendance
- Service connections made
- Agreement completed
- Case closed successfully

Unsuccessful Process

- Participant declines or does not attend
- Agreement not completed
- Case returned to Police Department and City Attorney
- City Attorney will determine next steps

Measuring Program Success

BCJC will track:



- City Circle attendance rate
- Agreement completion rate
- Repeat-ticket rates within 6 months
- Participant satisfaction
- Victim satisfaction
- Service referrals accepted
- Officer and volunteer feedback

Need: sign for door – confidential meeting in process, cards for police to handout, sharable document for media, etc, website updates