



S.9 - Afterhours Access to Sexual Assault Protection Orders

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee today. On behalf of the Vermont Network and our 15 Member Organizations, I am pleased to testify in support of S.9, afterhours access to sexual assault protection orders.

Sexual assault protection orders are a critical legal tool for survivors of sexual violence. They are civil court orders requested directly by a victim (plaintiff). If granted, sexual assault protection orders offer important protective measures, including requiring a perpetrator to maintain physical distance from a survivor, stopping contact with a survivor, or other measures necessary for a survivor's safety.

Currently, survivors can only request a sexual assault protection order during regular court orders, leaving them at risk when emergencies occur on evenings, weekends, or holidays. This stands in contrast to abuse prevention orders, available to victims of domestic violence, which are currently available afterhours. Lack of afterhours access to sexual assault orders is particularly concerning in environments where a survivor is in close proximity to the perpetrator, like a college campus or an apartment building.

Advocates at our Member Organizations, who provide 24/7 support to survivors, consistently report survivors' safety is compromised when they cannot seek a sexual assault protection order afterhours.

Atria Collective, our Member Organization serving Addison County, was called to the hospital for a Sexual Assault Nurse Exam (SANE) early evening on a Friday, after a survivor was sexually assaulted by an acquaintance.

An advocate supported the survivor throughout the exam and safety planning. As part of the safety plan, the survivor wanted to apply for a sexual assault protection order, because the perpetrator knew where she lived and other details about her life.

The survivor was assaulted on Friday evening, so the court was already closed for the day. She couldn't file for a protection order until Monday morning. This left a dangerous gap in her safety plan for multiple days after the assault, when she did not have legal protection to prohibit the perpetrator from returning to her home or place of work.

Survivors like Atria's client should have access to protective measures when they need them. That is why we strongly support S.9.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with the committee today. I would be happy to answer any questions.