



FY26 Budget
Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
Sarah Robinson, Co-Executive Director
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The Vermont Network is our state's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence. Our members are 15 independent, non-profit organizations that provide advocacy and support to survivors of violence. In 2024, our Member Organizations answered over 22,000 hotline calls from Vermonters seeking support and provided in-person advocacy to 8,422 individuals.

The Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund

Despite this essential work, **these organizations have been flat funded through Vermont's Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund for 15 years.** The Fund was established in 2008 and its revenues are comprised of two sources of fines and fees – a surcharge on civil and criminal court judgements and a surcharge on marriage licenses. The fund currently supports \$784,000 in expenses which are distributed among Vermont's 15 service providers using a funding formula, ensuring that all regions of Vermont receive equitable resources.

The Fund's revenues have experienced significant declines in the past 10 years., with a deficit each year since FY15 with the exception of one fiscal year. The General Assembly has had to make annual one-time appropriations to make the Fund whole and prevent cuts. In FY26, the fund is again facing an estimated shortfall of nearly \$100,000.

Federal Funding

In addition, **the shifting federal landscape poses unique challenges to our field, which is heavily dependent on federal funds.** Combined, the Vermont Network and our Member Organizations rely on \$12 million in federal funds. Our Member Organizations are majority federally funded. For some Member Organizations, federal funds represent 90% of their total budgets. Other states have already experienced cuts and layoffs at rape crisis and domestic violence shelters. We are monitoring these impacts here in Vermont. This uncertainty is threatening the promise that we make to Vermonters that there will be access to services 24 hours a day in any community in our state.

FY26 Budget Requests

The Vermont Network has two requests for the FY26 state budget to preserve essential services:

1. First, we estimate that the Special Fund must eventually support \$5 million in expenses annually. We're seeking a blend of General Fund dollars and other revenue sources to meet that need and expect this to be a multi-year endeavor. In FY26, we request an **initial investment of \$1.2 million in base funds. This \$1.2 million dollars will:**



- a. Preserve several staff positions that will be cut due to being moved out of the Victim Compensation Fund.
 - b. Fill the approximately \$100,000 projected deficit in the Special Fund in FY26.
 - c. Adjust distributions to Vermont Network Member Organizations for inflationary increases experienced over the past 15 years of flat funding, stabilizing core services for survivors.
2. Second, we request that the legislature consider **creating a million contingency fund for domestic and sexual violence organizations, for use if federal funds are eliminated.** We understand that there are \$4.1 million one-time dollars from excess General Fund and Human Services Caseload Reserves which could be used for this purpose and reappropriated next year in the event that contingency funds are not needed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.