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OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

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November 21, 2024

Vermont Senate Committee on Judiciary
Vermont House Committee on Corrections and Institutions
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Committees:

Pursuant to section three of Act 159 (2024), the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee ("Committee") is charged with reviewing whether the Department of Corrections' earned time program should be expanded to include parolees, as well as permitting earned time for educational credits for both offenders and parolees. Further, the Committee is charged with examining the current operation and effectiveness of the Department's victim notification system and its capacity to handle any such expansions. As a result, the Committee submits the recommendations contained herein to the Senate Committee on Judiciary and the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions for consideration during the upcoming biennium.

After soliciting testimony from interested parties and discussing the issues, the Committee recommends that the earned time program should not expand to include parolees at this time. Additionally, the earned time program should not expand to include educational credits as another pathway to sentencing reduction.

The Committee's overarching recommendation is that the system be overhauled at a minimum, or a new provider selected altogether, to ensure that the victim notification system operates as intended, in compliance with State law, and that users are able to customize their user experience to militate against re-traumatization. During the Committee's examination, it discovered several issues with the Department's victim notification system, including the efficacy of the system, who is responsible for notification, and problems with the user experience. As a result, it is recommended that your committees explore which entity or entities should be responsible for enrolling victims into the notification system, educating victims on its use, and notifying victims of a justice-involved individual's change in status. Further, your committees should consider whether these responsibilities are placed on one entity during the pre-trial process and on another post-adjudication. Specific entities to consider are the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs, the Judiciary, the Center for Crime Victim Services, and the Department of Corrections. Indeed, these entities have formed an ad hoc working group to address many of the listed issues. This ad hoc working group should serve as a resource for your committees as you undertake this work in the upcoming session.

On behalf of the Committee,

/s/ Alice M. Emmons

Rep. Alice M. Emmons, Chair
Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee