



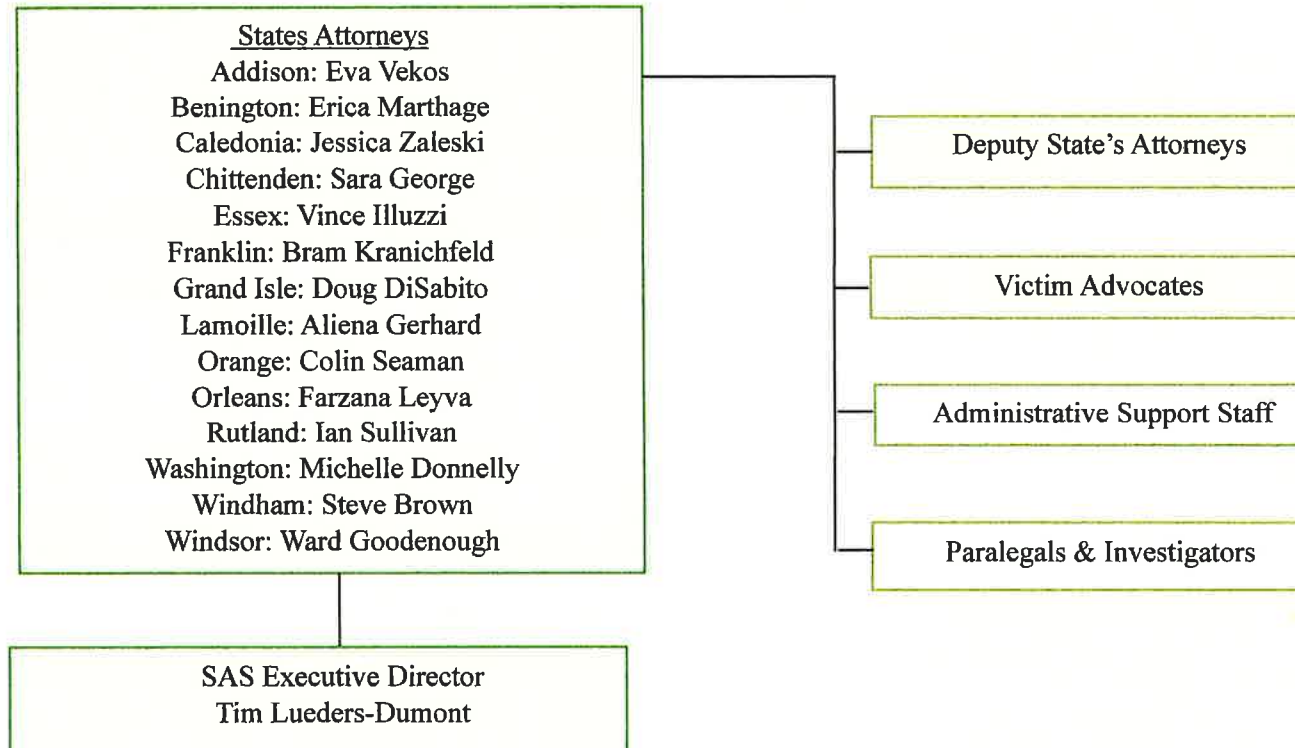
Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs

Vermont Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs

FY26 Budget Presentation

SAS Victim Advocates Budget

Vermont Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs





SAS Victim Advocates FY26 Budget Narrative

Mission: Under 13 VSA §5304 and 5306, the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs maintains a Victim Advocate Program to support victims throughout the investigation and court processes.

Operation and Funding: There are 29 Victim Advocates in the Department who are hired and supervised by their State's Attorney. Every SA Office has at least one Victim Advocate. The State General Fund pays the salary and benefits of the Victim Advocates at approximately \$3.3M annually.

Who We Serve: The Victim Advocates support the victims of crime and/or their family throughout the criminal justice process. The Victim Advocates carry a caseload of approximately 600 cases.

Operations: The Victim Advocates work with victims and their families to support them throughout the process. This includes timely notification to victims of investigations, depositions, court hearings; of their right to a victim impact statement; provide assistance in securing witness fees, and guidance in completing compensation and restitution paperwork. Victim Advocates provide information, along with DOC, of a person's release or escape from custody. They refer victims to services, and assist in obtaining protection from harm due to the investigation or prosecution of their case. They assist in retrieval of property. They support and guide victims in dealing with other parties in the criminal justice system.

Budget Issues and Pressures for FY26:

The Victim Advocates have caseloads of approximately 600 cases. SAS is requesting 6 new permanent Victim Advocates in FY26.

Recommendations for Programs/Work to be Shifted from SAS to Other Agencies / Delivery of Services

No recommendations at this time.

New Initiatives:

SAS is requesting 6 new permanent Victim Advocates in FY26.

Training on alternatives to compelling victim testimony in trauma-induced cases such as those the SIU's address.

Programs/Issues Posing Most Significant Challenges:

Increased crime and mental health issues in Vermont have led to more victims that need support and assistance.

Victims believe there is a lack of accountability by offenders in the current system.

High caseloads of prosecutors have sometimes resulted in the settlement of cases that the victims do not believe are fair to them as victims.

Restitution orders are difficult to attain and enforce.

What Work has been done to Address These Challenges?

The Department has been clear in reminding our attorneys that they must, by statute, communicate both case progress and any proposed changes, such as plea deals or diversion referrals, to the Victim Advocate who can then communicate that information to the victim(s). The Department is examining how to better support the goal of attaining and enforcing restitution orders.

Significant Financial Changes:

Increased costs for Victim Advocates' salary and benefits.

Source of Federal Funding:

None at this time.

Internal Performance Goals:

Increase the case intakes and investigations, reduce case backlogs, and support the victims through advocacy and potential prosecutions. Strengthen the work and participation of the SAS prosecutors with the Victim Advocates.
Benchmarks: Assistance in reducing case backlog by supporting case preparation with victims. Referrals to support services. Assisting with the successful disposition of cases.

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FY26 Victim Advocates' Budget

- FY26 Gov Recommend: \$3,339,331
- 7.0% Increase – GF (no other funds)
- Proposed budget would necessitate a Vacancy Savings figure of \$270,675, and increase of \$200,635 from FY25
- 4% operating budget; 96% personnel costs

BUDGET and STAFFING PRESSURES:

Workload – relating to the 23,000 active cases, SAS Victim Advocates average 600+ cases per VA

Impact of increased crime and mental health issues in Vermont. Victims are extremely frustrated by what they believe is lack of accountability from offenders; high caseloads often results in settlement of cases that victims do not believe are fair; restitution orders are difficult to attain and enforce.

Regardless of case disposition, the Victim Advocates are still engaged in victim notification, referrals to other services and counseling, etc.