

May 6, 2026

Vermont Senate Committee on Institutions
Chair Wendy Harrison
Room 7, Vermont State House
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Chair Harrison and Members of the Senate Institutions Committee,

We write to express our strong support for H.550, a bill to codify gender equity practices in Vermont correctional facilities and embed the standards of the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) into state law.

Protecting people in the state's custody is a core responsibility of government. Codifying practices that promote the safety and dignity of incarcerated people is an essential reflection of that duty. H.550 will create a clear, transparent standard of care for individuals within Department of Corrections custody.

In December, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a memo disavowing PREA regulations that are designed to protect transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people from sexual violence. It is likely that the federal government will soon formally rescind these regulations, which means transgender incarcerated people will only be protected to the extent provided by the state.

Vermont has invested years in developing thoughtful gender-responsive practices and strengthening its prevention and response to sexual violence in correctional facilities—and there is still more work to do. Codifying existing standards in state law fills a gap left by the federal government's rollback and ensures durable protection less susceptible to changes in administration.

Research consistently shows LGBTQ+ people in custody face disproportionately high rates of sexual violence victimization. Vermont's laws must account for this reality.

As protections for queer and transgender incarcerated people are rapidly being eroded at the federal level, now is the time to safeguard the progress Vermont has made. We urge the committee to swiftly advance H.550.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Vermont

Vermont Commission on Women

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law)

Vermont Human Rights Commission

Mercy Connections

Vermont Legal Aid

National Association of Social Workers, Vermont Chapter

Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Out in the Open

Vermont Office of the Healthcare Advocate

Planned Parenthood Vermont Action Fund

Vermont Works for Women

SafeSpace Anti-Violence Program