



**FY26 Budget**  
**Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**  
**Sarah Robinson, Co-Executive Director**  
**April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

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.

Community based services to victims of domestic and sexual violence are a critical part of the criminal justice response. The Member Organizations of the Vermont Network:

- Serve as the primary providers assisting victims of domestic and sexual violence seeking civil protection orders;
- Respond to and assist survivors seeking forensic exams at Vermont hospitals;
- House hundreds of Vermont families fleeing violence. In 2024, our Member Organizations provided shelter and transitional housing to over 1,400 survivors including nearly 500 children;
- Accompany survivors to court as they proceed through civil and criminal cases.

Despite this essential work, these organizations have been flat funded through Vermont's Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund for 15 years. While almost every other actor in the criminal justice system (such as prosecutors, defenders, or law enforcement officers) have mechanisms to receive cost-of-living increases, community-based advocates have received no cost-of-living increases through the Domestic and Sexual Violence 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. The Fund has experienced a deficit each year since FY 15 with the exception of one fiscal year and 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 close to \$93,000 in this fiscal year alone.

In addition, the shifting federal landscape is posing unique challenges to our field. Combined, the Vermont Network and our Member Organizations rely on \$12 million in federal funds. Our Member Organizations are majority federally funded, and for some, federal funds represent 90% of their total budgets.

Our primary sources of federal funding are the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women and the Centers for Disease Control Violence Prevention Division. All funding



solicitations were removed from the Office on Violence Against Women website in January and have not been re-posted. The Violence Prevention Division at the CDC has been decimated by staff cuts and there are currently no remaining federal grant program officers in that division. States across the country are experiencing cuts and layoffs at rape crisis and domestic violence shelters. 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.

We estimate that the Special Fund must eventually support an additional \$5 million in expenses annually to meet the need for services. We expect this to be a multi-year endeavor.

**FY 26 Budget Request: An initial investment of \$1.2 million in base funds, which is essential to prevent cuts in our field.**

The House-passed budget included \$450,000 in one-time funds for the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special fund. **This amount is insufficient and will result in advocates losing their jobs and reductions in services to survivors – services that have proven themselves to be essential to Vermont communities.** We implore the Senate to increase the investment in the Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund in the FY26 budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.