



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: The Vermont Network Announces passage of H.74, legislation in support of victims of domestic and sexual violence**

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The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence enthusiastically welcomes the passage of H.74, An Act Relating to Domestic and Sexual Violence, as signed by Governor Phil Scott on May 23, 2017.

The 15 member programs of the Vermont Network served more than 5,000 victims of domestic violence and more than 1200 victims of sexual violence last year alone. We know that numerous other victims of domestic violence also experience sexual violence each year in Vermont and still other victims will never be counted in our tally. The Network is committed to ensuring that **all** victims in Vermont have access to the supports, services, and justice they need and deserve in order to live lives free from violence and fear. H.74 is a critical step in this direction.

H. 74 includes provides the following:

- Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights: H.74 mirrors the federal law signed by then President Obama in October of 2016. This bill ensures proper and timely processing of sexual assault forensic exam kits and victim access to information, notification, support, and services.
- No contact in Relief from Abuse Orders: H. 74 also codifies in statute that a victim of domestic violence who seeks an emergency and/or final relief from abuse order in civil court may be issued an order which prohibits contact between the alleged perpetrator and the victim. This provides the assurance of space and time for a victim and her/his children to make plans for her/his safety without the potential danger, confusion, and fear which accompanies contact with the abuser.
- Eliminates the Statute of Limitations on Sexual Assault: Experiencing a traumatic event such as a sexual assault has significant impact on the brain and memory and it can take years, even decades, for sexual assault victims to be ready to engage with the legal system. Victims of serious and intimate trauma such as sexual assault may remain fearful and silenced for years following an assault. Frequently the perpetrator is known to the victim, or the victim's family, and this can complicate the victim's ability to come forward within a proscribed timeline. Eliminating the statute of limitations on sexual assault in Vermont will allow prosecutors more time to build thorough cases against alleged perpetrators.

Across the country, 17 states have no statute of limitations AT ALL for any sexual assault charge. Until the passage of H. 74, Vermont was one of only 11 states that still had a statute of limitations of 6 years or under for sexual assault. In the last two years alone, at least six states have extended or eliminated their statutes of limitations on sexual assaults. The elimination of the statutes of limitation for sexual assault in Vermont is a vital enhancement for the women and men who finally find the courage to speak after decades of silence and fear.



- Protects the Rape Victim’s Right to Child Custody: Ensures that perpetrators of a sexual assault through which a child is conceived will have no right to modify their child custody orders (which prohibit custody).
- Updates in statute the misdemeanor crime of sexual violence for the purposes of effective prosecution, in response to a recent Vermont Supreme Court decision. This crime includes the grabbing and groping of genitalia.

“The passage of H. 74 marks a significant step forward for victims of domestic and sexual violence in Vermont.” Says Karen Tronsgard –Scott, Executive Director of the Vermont Network. “For those victims that are seeking supports and services, Vermont must ensure that they get all of the help they need. For those that have yet to tell their stories, we must ensure that once they come forward, whenever they come forward, Vermont’s nurses and labs are able to continue providing timely and high quality health care and support, and Vermont’s law enforcement and courts have the necessary tools to act swiftly and effectively on their behalf.”

The Network applauds and appreciates the leadership of Representative Maxine Grad and Senator Dick Sears in further protecting victims of domestic and sexual violence throughout Vermont. We wish to also recognize the commitment and efforts of all members of both the House and Senate Judiciary Committees.

Founded in 1986, the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence seeks to create statutes and policies that uphold the human rights of domestic and sexual violence victims and reflect concern for the safety and well-being of every last Vermonter. Our purpose is to create a world free of oppression where actions, beliefs and systems support all people to thrive.