



2026 Policy Advocacy Guide



VERMONT
NETWORK



Introduction

Welcome! At the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (Vermont Network), we know our vision of a violence-free Vermont is only possible when we build it together.

We are proud to work collectively with survivors, advocates, and allies to advance system changes that bring us closer to that goal.

When we act collectively, we make change. Your advocacy—whether it's a single email, a conversation with a legislator, sharing your story, or attending a public hearing—makes a difference. The Vermont Network is here to support and partner with you throughout this work.

This handbook offers the tools, information, and guidance to take the next step in your advocacy. Inside, you'll find practical tools, guidance, and resources to help you connect with legislators and make the voices of survivors heard.

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About the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Our Purpose

The Vermont Network is Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence. Founded in 1986, we are a statewide non-profit 501(c)(3) membership organization representing 14 independent, non-profit organizations that provide essential advocacy and support to survivors across Vermont.

Our legislative work is driven by the voices of survivors and our coalition, and reflects the values that guide our organization:

- **Bold.** We champion transformative systems change to improve survivors' lives and uproot the causes of violence.
- **Love.** We center care and compassion in our work, prioritizing strong relationships with survivors, allies, lawmakers, and our coalition.
- **Integrity.** We advocate for evidence-informed, best-practice policies shaped by survivor experience.
- **Respect.** We build relationships across difference and honor the dignity of every person, especially every survivor.

Our legislative advocacy is non-partisan; we advance meaningful policy solutions by grounding our work in the issues and in survivor needs.

Together, we strive to uproot the causes of violence so that every last person can thrive.

What is Legislative Advocacy?

Advocacy includes any action that speaks in favor of a cause, recommends a policy, supports or defends an issue, or elevates the voices and needs of others. Examples include:

- Sharing expertise about your program or the needs of survivors in your community;
- Speaking publicly about issues of concern to the general public or to specific audiences;
- Testifying at a hearing, writing a letter to the editor, or communicating with government officials;
- Informing your members of Congress about how federal grants (such as FVPSA, VAWA, etc.) have strengthened services in your community;

- Inviting a legislator to visit your program to demonstrate how policies and funding directly support survivors, the Vermont Network, and its member organizations.

What is the Legislative Process in Vermont?

Basics of the Vermont Legislature

The Vermont Legislature is bicameral, consisting of two chambers: the Vermont House of Representatives (150 members) and the Senate (30 members). Currently, Democrats hold a majority across the Legislature (56%), with Republicans (37%), Progressives (4%), and Independents (2%) making up the remainder. In the Senate, membership includes 13 Democrats, 13 Republicans, and 4 Progressives.

The House is led by the Speaker, currently Speaker Jill Krowinski, and the Senate is led by the Senate President Pro Tempore (often called the “pro tem”), currently Senator Phil Baruth.

Legislators are elected every two years. The Legislature meets in Montpelier from January to May to introduce and consider legislation and to pass the state budget. Because Vermont has a citizen legislature, lawmakers serve only part of the year and generally do not have personal staff or offices. Most legislators hold jobs outside their legislative role or are retired.

The Legislative Process

Most policymaking in Vermont happens in committees, where issues are studied, testimony is taken, and legislation is drafted. The Legislature has 14 standing committees in the House and 11 in the Senate. House committees meet full-time, and each Representative serves on one committee. Senate committees meet for half-day blocks, and each Senator serves on one morning committee and one afternoon committee.

We work most closely with the following committees:

- **House Appropriations; House Ways & Means; Senate Appropriations; Senate Finance:** Ensuring sustainable revenues and funding for domestic and sexual violence services.
- **House Commerce and Economic Development; Senate Economic Development:** Advancing policies that strengthen survivors' financial stability and rights in the workplace.

- **House Corrections & Institutions; Senate Institutions:** Meeting the needs of incarcerated survivors.
- **House Judiciary; Senate Judiciary:** Improving legal system outcomes and protections for survivors.
- **House Human Services; Senate Health & Welfare:** Ensuring social services—including emergency and temporary shelter—meet survivors' needs.

Not every bill that is introduced receives a hearing; in fact, most bills introduced each session do not advance out of committee.

When a bill does move forward, the process typically unfolds as follows: A committee takes testimony and may amend the bill before voting on whether to advance it. If approved, the bill goes to the full House or Senate for debate and a vote. If it passes, the bill then moves to the other chamber, where the process repeats—committee review, possible amendments, and floor action. If both chambers pass the same version, the bill goes to the Governor for signature, veto, or passage without signature. If the two chambers pass different versions, a conference committee may be appointed to negotiate a final agreement before the bill is sent to the Governor.

This committee-centered process means that early engagement—sharing expertise, elevating survivor voices, and offering clear policy guidance—is essential to moving meaningful legislation forward.

Where Can You Find Key Information About the Legislature

Know Your Legislators

Find out who represents you and/or your organization. The number of legislators representing you varies by district. You can search for your House and Senate members [here](#).

Once you identify your legislators, sign up for their newsletters and follow them on social media. This helps you stay informed about their priorities, local events, and opportunities to engage.

Tracking Bills You Care About

The [Vermont Legislature's website](#) provides all the official information you need to follow a bill—from committee schedules and agendas to livestreams, recordings, and written testimony.

If you need help navigating this site or locating information, Vermont Network Policy staff are available to assist.

Nearly all State House meetings are public. We encourage you to listen to discussions on issues that impact survivors. You can attend in person or watch committee livestreams and recordings on YouTube [here](#).

Maps and Parking

The State House is located at 115 State Street, Montpelier. [Building maps](#) are available online to help you navigate the building.

Parking in Montpelier is limited. Free street parking can often be found on Baldwin Street, Bailey Avenue, and parts of State Street. Arriving early increases your chances of finding a space. Metered parking is available near the State House and throughout downtown, and a paid parking lot is located behind the Capitol Plaza Hotel.

Learn About the State Budget

Early each January, the Governor presents their state budget proposal to the Legislature. This begins the appropriations process. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees then take testimony and develop their respective budget recommendations.

Once both chambers pass a budget, a budget conference committee—composed of members from each chamber—works to reconcile any differences. After both the House and Senate approve the conference report, the finalized budget is sent to the Governor, who may sign it, veto it, or allow it to become law without a signature.

The [Joint Fiscal Office](#) assists the legislature with preparing a budget estimates, reviewing programs and operations of state entities, and preparing fiscal notes and impact statements on proposed legislation.

Vermont Network: Legislative Agenda

Each year, the Vermont Network develops a Legislative Agenda outlining state-level policy priorities that work to uproot the causes of violence and strengthen the well-being of survivors, their families, and communities across Vermont.

You can find the full [2026 Legislative Agenda](#) here or at the end of this Advocacy Guide.



Take Action

Talk to Policy Makers

Once you know who represents you and your community, the most effective way to influence policy is to build a relationship with your legislators. You can schedule a meeting to discuss specific legislation or to educate them about the importance of domestic and sexual violence services in your community.

Schedule in Advance

Write, email, or call your legislator to request a meeting. During the legislative session, you can also call the State House Sergeant-at-Arms at 802-828-2228 to leave a message.

Contact Vermont Network policy staff for support preparing for—or joining—you in the meeting.

Come Prepared

Develop a short agenda with two or three key points. Bring talking points and any background materials you may need.

Research your legislator to understand their interests, committee assignments, and priorities—information you can find on their legislative website bios or social media.

If available, provide your legislator with a one-page profile or fact sheet. The Vermont Network regularly produces materials on our legislative priorities that you can share.

Additional resources—photos, stories, newspaper articles, or program information—can further support your position.

Stay on Message

Explain why you requested the meeting and how the issue connects to your personal and professional experience. Tailor your message to the legislator's interests. For example, if a Senator serves on Appropriations, focus on funding for member programs.

Remember: You are the expert on your community and your own story.

Be respectful

Thank your legislator for meeting with you—both in person and by email. Follow up with any materials or information you agreed to send.

Put yourself in the public official's position. Understanding their perspectives, responsibilities, and the needs of their broader constituency can help you communicate more effectively—and encourages them to do the same for you.

Remember: If you disagree, focus on the *issue*, not the person.

Follow Up with the Vermont Network Policy Team

After your meeting and follow-up email, connect with the Vermont Network Policy Team. Share how the conversation went: What was the tone? Did the legislator express support or concerns? Did they request additional information or offer to take action? This helps the Network coordinate strong, unified advocacy.

Advice for Successful Outreach

Here are ten impactful actions you can take to step towards a violence-free world:

1. **Write a letter or postcard** to a lawmaker.
2. **Send an email** to share your perspective or request a legislator's support on an issue.
3. **Make a phone call** to express your views directly with a legislator.
4. **Meet in person** by requesting a one-on-one appointment.
5. **Submit a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed** to elevate survivors' needs and policy priorities.

6. **Attend the Vermont Network's Advocacy Day** at the State House, typically held in early February each year.
7. **Engage in national advocacy** by writing to our Congressional delegation about national issues impacting survivors.
8. **Use social media** to show support and raise awareness—tag the Vermont Network (@vermontnetwork).
9. **Attend a public hearing**, which gives constituents a chance to speak directly to lawmakers on issues such as the state budget, community services, or policy changes.
10. **Start a conversation in your community** to raise awareness and mobilize your neighbor to join you in taking action.

Vermont Network Policy Team



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Vermont Network 2026 Legislative Agenda

2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



The Vermont Network advocates for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and our 14 independent non-profit member organizations that provide life-saving services across the state, including emergency housing, 24/7 hotlines, legal advocacy, children's services, and violence prevention programming.

ISSUE	BACKGROUND	SOLUTION
Funding Survivor Support Services	Our member organizations provide life-saving services that support the physical, emotional, and financial safety of thousands of survivors every year. Their primary state funding source faces ongoing deficits and instability—putting these essential services at risk.	Sustainably fund Vermont's Domestic and Sexual Violence Fund. At a minimum, appropriate funds to cover anticipated deficits in the fund and maintain current funding levels to prevent cuts and ensure consistent services for survivors.
Victim Voice & Safety in the Criminal Legal System	A victim's ability to be notified of updates and heard in a criminal proceeding profoundly shapes their sense of justice. Gaps in notification erode trust and limit a victim's ability to make informed decisions about personal safety.	Make targeted improvements to victim notification procedures across the life of a case. Create a forensic liaison within the Department of Mental Health to support victims when the person who caused harm is found incompetent or not guilty by reason of insanity.
Legal Protections for Victims of Image-Based Abuse	The non-consensual recording and sharing of explicit images—sometimes called image-based abuse—can cause a victim severe and lasting harm. In many cases, these images circulate for years unnoticed, leaving victims without a fair opportunity to seek justice.	Amend the statute of limitations to begin tolling when a victim discovers the violation, ensuring they have time to pursue justice. Recognize the harm of image-based abuse by allowing victims to seek accountability and repair for the severe emotional damage it causes in civil court.

ISSUE	BACKGROUND	SOLUTION
Statewide Supervised Visitation	Supervised visitation provides a safe, structured space for children to maintain relationships with a parent when safety concerns are present, like in cases involving domestic violence. This service is often ordered by a court or the Department of Children and Families.	Support and fund a statewide system of accessible, high-quality supervised visitation programs for Vermont families.
Coerced Debt Protections	When an abusive partner takes out debt in a survivor's name without consent, it can destroy a survivor's credit, limit access to housing or education, and undermine their safety and independence for years.	Establish a clear and accessible process to release survivors from responsibility for coerced debts and restore their credit records.
Improving Outcomes for Justice-Involved Women	Most incarcerated women are survivors of domestic or sexual violence. Despite great need, few have access to the rehabilitation and re-entry support needed for a successful return to their communities.	Replace the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility with a smaller, gender-responsive facility and expand rehabilitative and re-entry programming for justice-involved women.
Safe Housing for Survivors	Without safe, stable housing, survivors often face an impossible choice between homelessness and staying in an abusive relationship or unsafe housing.	Protect survivors' access to housing, including emergency and temporary housing through the General Assistance Housing Program and Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP).

To learn more, visit vtnetwork.org/policy or email Charlie Giliserman (Policy Director) at charlie@vtnetwork.org.