

**CJC Victim Safety Protocol<sup>i</sup>**  
**Approved January 13, 2011**

24 VSA § 1967 prohibits Community Justice Centers (CJCs) from receiving cases involving domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual assault or stalking, “except in department of corrections offender reentry programs pursuant to protocols protecting victims.” This protocol is intended to guide the work of Community Justice Centers undertaking offender reentry programs with offenders who have committed acts of domestic violence, sexual violence or stalking.

**Guiding Principles**

Citizen involvement in offender reentry services is more effective and provides better safety measures for victims when:

- Victim safety is paramount and all information regarding the offender is assessed for its potential implications for victim safety. Any information concerning victim safety is made available to other people working with the offender.
- All staff and volunteers understand that providing any services to offenders may carry inherent safety risks for victims, even as it has the potential to strengthen safety for victims.
- Victim input is solicited and considered throughout reentry programming.
- Confidentiality of victim information is respected.
- Whenever possible, victims are provided with information about the reentry program and the offender’s participation, and always have the power to control their own participation.
- Offenders receive services or programming designed to address criminogenic needs and reduce risk.
- CJCs strive to incorporate an inclusive definition of victims that may extend beyond the direct victim of record and includes affected parties.

**Staff and Volunteers Shall be Trained, Well-Supervised and Supported**

- Staff must have a comprehensive understanding of victim safety issues in order to provide ongoing support to volunteers. Staff support for volunteers working with an offender of sexual or domestic violence will be continuous and comprehensive, and will reflect best practices in working with offenders.
- Volunteers will be provided with information and have sufficient expertise to identify and appropriately respond to any risks to victims. This information will be intended to guide practice, especially when issues such as subtle dynamics of power and control emerge. Staff and volunteers must be able to respond to any risks to victim safety that become apparent, and to avoid inadvertent collusion with offenders.

- Member programs of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and treatment/risk management program providers should be involved in developing and implementing training for new volunteers (including BIPs and sex offender treatment providers, and mental health and substance abuse providers when appropriate and possible). Volunteers who have been previously trained should be offered advanced information and training as it relates to their clients' issues.

### **Offender Reentry Programs Shall Have Ongoing Communication with Department Of Corrections (DOC)**

- Each CJC will establish a process for ongoing communication with DOC and other service providers.
- CJC's shall exchange information with DOC in a timely fashion regarding emerging issues and behaviors of offenders and any information relevant to victim safety.
- If CJC staff or volunteers have reason to believe that a victim may be in imminent danger, they will attempt to contact the victim. In addition, the CJC will contact law enforcement and the local DOC District Office's emergency line.

### **Victim Communication and Outreach**

- When offenders are receiving intensive, ongoing reentry services (such as COSA services), every victim will be sent a written notification from the offender's Probation Officer saying that the offender is being released and will be participating in the offender reentry program. The notice will be sent as soon as the offender is accepted into the program and will provide contact information if the victim wants to be involved or wants to relay any information to the reentry program staff and volunteers.
- Unless a victim has clearly communicated to the DOC a request to receive NO information, then every attempt will be made to contact the victim. Notification to victims should occur via a letter to the victim drafted by the CJC (draft letter attached). The letter will be sent from the Department of Corrections, signed by CJC staff and a representative from the Department (either the Victim Service Specialist or the Probation Officer). The letter will provide information about the reentry program and an invitation to contact the CJC, the Probation Officer/Victim Service Specialist or the Victim Services Program and/or local victim services, including member programs of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence ([www.vtnetwork.org](http://www.vtnetwork.org)).
- When victims communicate with the CJC, staff must respect victim confidentiality as requested. However, if a victim who wants to remain anonymous shares information with the CJC that an offender may be violating conditions of his or her release or poses a safety

risk, that information will be shared with the DOC in a way that doesn't identify the victim as the source of that information.

- When victims initially contact the CJC, staff will ask the victim whether there are any children impacted by the offender's release. If there are children involved, the work of offender reentry program staff and volunteers will be informed by this information and staff will provide information to the victim about children's services in the community.
- CJs are not in the position to provide direct services for victims or to change conditions of an offender's supervision or court orders. Victims should be referred to advocacy services, the courts, and the Department of Corrections – either to the supervising officer or the Victim Services Program.

### **Confidentiality**

- Confidentiality of victim and offender must be honored. While it is important for reentry program volunteers to have adequate information to hold the offender accountable and recognize any safety concerns, it is also critical that victims be fully informed, and their confidentiality concerns honored.
- All staff and volunteers should sign a confidentiality agreement (attached), and every volunteer and staff member should receive training on the specific parameters of confidentiality as they apply to offender and victim information. Reviewing confidentiality agreements and/or displaying the confidentiality policy at each meeting are strongly encouraged.

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<sup>i</sup> This document is intended to guide the work of Community Justice Centers in offender reentry programs. The Department of Corrections' role in this process is guided by separate DOC policies.