



MEMORANDUM

TO: Bob Kiss, Mayor

FROM: Karen Vastine, Community Justice Center Coordinator

DATE: December 15, 2011

RE: Legislative Advocacy for CJC

RECEIVED
Mayor
NV 12/16/11

Thanks to your support and City Council's, the Community Justice Network of Vermont (CJNVT) has been able to retain Zatz & Renfrew Consulting (ZRC) to lobby on its behalf during the 2010 and 2011 Legislative Sessions. In 2010, the City's contribution of \$2400 allowed the CJNVT to expand its contract from legislative monitoring to advocacy and lobbying. Last year's contribution of \$2000 allowed the CJNVT to continue its contract at the same level of lobbying advocacy. These contributions augmented contributions from all Community Justice Centers (CJCs).

Given the financial climate and the sweeping programmatic changes we anticipate being proposed, it is increasingly important and necessary for cost-saving programs like the CJCs to have a constant presence at the statehouse. For the past two years, the City's contributions allowed the CJCs to be important players in policy decisions that directly impact the Department of Corrections (DOC) and public safety in all communities.

Below is a list of the accomplishments of the last legislative session and a sample of the ongoing efforts of ZRC:

FY 2012 Budget:

Much of the focus of the legislature in the last session was on reducing the size of the DOC budget. The base funding for the CJCs is the Safer Communities Grant, which is managed and overseen by DOC. ZRC re-secured the increased funding they successfully advocated for in the 2011 budget. This \$650,000 was not only secured, it was added to the CJCs' base funding in the DOC budget. Thus, the base funding for CJCs remained level when many community-based Agency of Human Services grants were cut or eliminated. These efforts required countless hours of monitoring and advocacy. At times as many as six committees were considering legislation that would have had a direct impact on the budget for the CJCs. For the City of Burlington, ZRC's efforts led to another year of program security in the amount of \$268,000. These funds support the CJC's infrastructure, staffing and programming—specifically, restorative justice panels, victim support, and offender reentry.

H.188 - Rent to Own:

Along with other advocates, the CJNVT supported this bill, which would offer consumer protections, including Rent-to-Own businesses being required to list the average retail price for an item AND the total amount an individual would pay after completing the renting process. This bill could positively impact many members of our community including victims and offenders served by the CJC. We hope to move this bill this year.

S.37 – Expungement:

This bill was introduced in the Senate Judicial Committee. It would allow a person with a nonviolent crime to ask the court for an expungement after 10 years of no further crimes. ZRC monitored, in person, all testimony in both the Senate and House Judicial committees. The legislators could not reach agreement on this bill after it passed the House and was taken up by the Senate. It was sent to a conference committee and will be re-considered in the upcoming session. This bill will have a direct impact on the rights of individuals served by the restorative justice program.

Corrections Oversight Committee:

This committee meets when the legislature is not in session. ZRC attends these meetings to follow what is happening with Corrections and its justice reinvestment efforts. The CJsCs represent an area of interest to this group because of their direct involvement with justice reinvestment efforts. ZRC will advocate continued funding and even an increase in the FY 13 budget. They will also continue to raise the profile of the CJsCs as a community-based, cost-saving solution to support individuals from entering the court system or corrections AND the successful reentry of individuals who have been incarcerated.

Misdemeanor Sentencing Review Committee:

This tri-branch committee is working to clarify and create consistency around how misdemeanors are handled by alternatives to the court system, the courts, and DOC. Given that the CJsCs serve misdemeanants in their restorative justice panels, the recommendations of this group have a direct bearing on CJC programming and, by extension, community safety.

Due to the expanding needs of the CJNVT and the amount of time necessary to follow all of the policy proposals and budget discussions connected to CJC work, ZRC is, understandably, requesting more compensation for their efforts this year. To that end, I respectfully request that the City of Burlington contribute \$3,000 to the ZRC contract. This funding more than justifies itself for the financial security ZRC's efforts provide to Burlington's Community Justice Center, the recipient of the most state funds.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the Community Justice Center and the work that we do to support the positive resolution of conflict in our community, of victims, and of positive restoration of the harm caused by offenders.