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**Report to  
The Vermont Legislature**

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**Funding Alternatives for Community Referrals**

**In Accordance with Section 9 of [Act 180 \(2024\)](#)**

**Submitted to:** Senate Committee on Judiciary  
House Committee on Judiciary

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**Report Date:** December 1, 2024

## Introduction

This report has been prepared in accordance with Sec. 9 of Act 180 (2024), which directed the Office of the Attorney General (AGO) to report on funding alternatives for community-based referrals as follows:

*(a) On or before December 1, 2024, the Office of the Attorney General, in consultation with community-based restorative justice providers, the Department of Public Safety, the Vermont Association of Chiefs of Police, the Office of Racial Equity, and other stakeholders as needed, shall submit a written report outlining funding alternatives for community referrals to the Senate and House Committees on Judiciary. The report shall include funding alternatives considering:*

- (1) federal, state, and local funding options;*
- (2) entities through which funding could be provided; and*
- (3) oversight requirements.*

For the purposes of this report, Act 180 defines community referral as “a referral of an individual to a community-based restorative justice provider that does not involve criminal offenses or delinquencies for which probable cause exists.” Closely related, community referrals are part of a continuum that includes pre-charge diversion and diversion services, which restorative justice centers may also provide.

## Context and Value of Community Referrals to Restorative Justice Providers

Law enforcement, prosecutors and restorative justice practitioners agree that resolving disputes and addressing problematic behavior quickly is better for all involved and may prevent conflicts from escalating to the point of law enforcement or justice system involvement. The criminal and youth justice systems’ response can be expensive and a challenging experience for all parties, although it is often the most appropriate response. For these reasons, prosecutors and law enforcement turn to Vermont’s community-based restorative justice providers to help with disputes and other events that may not cross the threshold into criminal or delinquent behavior.

In addition, community members, including landlords, school staff, town officials, and families, also seek assistance in resolving conflicts from these providers. Many Vermonters, especially BIPOC/people of color, those who identify as LGBTQAI+ or who experience being marginalized for other reasons, may not approach law enforcement or other government systems for assistance in resolving conflict. Community-based restorative justice providers can be a safe and useful resource to support Vermonters in informally resolving many types of conflict. They offer an essential service that benefits all our communities.

In developing this report, providers and others expressed concerns about long-term funding for services, including whether the Department of Corrections (DOC) would continue to include funding for this work. Subsequently, in October, DOC issued a request for proposals for restorative justice post-adjudication services; community service referrals are not included in the RFP.

## Funding Source Options

With the goal that all Vermonters should have the option of a restorative response to address conflicts and harm, below is a review of the possible funding sources. The AGO and community-based restorative justice providers agree with this goal, and Act 180 reflects the Legislature's commitment to statewide access for restorative justice services for criminal and delinquent behavior.

- **Local funding.** Many community-based providers receive local funding from towns and individual donors. Neither of these funding sources is sufficiently reliable or adequate to further the goal of statewide capacity. For example, to receive municipal funding, some towns require annual collection of signatures as part of a request, and the amounts provided from a town's budget are often—and understandably—small. Along with logistical challenges, this model can create and increase existing inequalities in access to services based on the relative size and tax-base of a municipality. Fundraising from individuals and private organization is in itself a costly effort in terms of time and financial resources. Both of these funding sources are also more variable from year-to-year based on other factors pressuring town and individual donor's budgets. Local funding can be an important supplement that demonstrates local commitment to restorative justice and community-based conflict resolution but is inherently limited.
- **Federal funding.** Grants from the federal government, perhaps stemming from a congressional earmark, can serve as a significant, though time-limited, investment. While federal funding may be an important source for pilots, no regular funding stream was identified by government and community partners.
- **State funding.** The goal of sustainable, base support throughout Vermont makes the prospect of state funding of greatest interest. For decades, the State has provided through the Department of Corrections and the Department for Children and Families funding for restorative justice providers to respond to community referrals. As of FY 2026, only DCF BARJ funding will support this work, curtailing providers' ability to address incidents early. This change presents a disservice to Vermont. As noted above, law enforcement and others value services that can diffuse conflict and provide a resource to which they can refer people struggling in their community. Investing in community-based resolution of conflicts addresses immediate needs, can prevent escalation of conflict and further public safety goals, and has the potential to develop people's skills and abilities to resolve future conflicts.

## Possible Entities to Provide Funding

If the Legislature appropriates funding for community referrals, various state entities could serve as the funding oversight authority. The following chart outlines options. Some of the following observations assume that current community-based restorative justice providers (RJ providers) would receive funding to respond to community referrals. At this point, there is no other apparent existing means to provide this service.

<b>Entity</b>	<b>Reasons considered</b>	<b>Concerns</b>
Agency of Administration – Office of Racial Equity	Embed this work in a racial equity framework.	May be “mission creep.”  Does not currently award grants.  A new funding source would add administrative cost to providers.
Agency of Commerce & Community Development	Mission is to help Vermonters improve their quality of life and build strong communities.	Not an existing statewide funder of restorative justice. A new funding source would add administrative cost to providers.
Agency of Human Services (AHS) – Secretary’s Office	Office has broad oversight of services meeting Vermonters’ needs.	Not an existing statewide funder of restorative justice. A new funding source would add administrative cost to providers.
AHS – Department for Children & Families (DCF)	Knowledgeable about restorative justice and has existing contractual relationship with many RJ providers.	Children, youth and their families are the focus of DCF; community referrals may be broader.
AHS – Department of Corrections (DOC)	Knowledgeable about restorative justice and has existing contractual relationship with many RJ providers.	Adults convicted of crime are the focus of DOC; community referrals may be broader.
AHS – Department of Health (VDH)	VDH’s vision is that all people and communities have equitable opportunities to achieve their highest level of health and well-being. VDH community violence prevention grants are supporting work in schools and other settings.	Not an existing statewide funder of restorative justice. A new funding source would add administrative cost to providers.
Attorney General’s Office	Knowledgeable about restorative justice and has existing contractual relationship with many RJ providers. The work of community referrals aligns with pre-charge Diversion.	Limited staffing capacity.

## Oversight Requirements

A funding entity's priorities and granting/contracting procedures would inform oversight requirements, aligning with the State's standard provisions (i.e., Attachment C of all State-issued grants and contracts). Providers should be involved in developing performance measures that prioritize the use of restorative justice principles and processes. In addition, the Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework guides current evaluation of services. Focusing on whether people report they are "better off" after engaging in services is a priority for this type of work.

## Organizations Consulted

Staff from the Community Justice Unit of the Attorney General's Office met with representatives of interested stakeholders. Their information and views informed this report.

- **Community-based restorative justice providers**
  - Mel Motel, Co-Director of Restorative Justice Programs, Interaction (Brattleboro)
  - Leitha Cipriano, Executive Director, Center for Restorative Justice (Bennington)
  - Heather Hobart, Executive Director Lamoille Restorative Center
  - Martha McLafferty, Executive Director, Hartford Community Justice Center
- **Law enforcement**
  - Mandy S. Wooster, Executive Director of Policy Development, Department of Public Safety
  - Chief Loretta Stalnaker, Royalton Police Department and president of Vermont Association of Chiefs of Police
  - Tim Lueders-Dumont, Legislative & Assistant Appellate Attorney, Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs
- **Office of Racial Equity**
  - Xusana Davis, Executive Director
  - Laura Carter, Racial Justice Statistics Analyst
- **Agency of Human Services**
  - Lindy Boudreau, Juvenile Justice Director, Dept. for Children and Families
  - Derek Miodownik, Community & Restorative Justice Executive, Dept. of Corrections
- **U.S. Congress, Office of U.S. Representative Becca Balint**
  - David Scherr, State Director

## Conclusion

Recognizing the State's long-time financial support for community-based responses to conflict as well as law enforcement and prosecutors' reliance on these services, the Attorney General recommends the Legislature identify base funding to ensure all Vermonters have the opportunity to obtain these services. The Attorney General makes this recommendation understanding the funding challenges facing the State and at the same time wanting to affirm strong support for and recognition of the value of community-based restorative justice services to resolve conflicts in our communities.