



REPORT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
REGARDING LAW ENFORCEMENT MENTAL HEALTH TRAININGS  
PURSUANT TO SECTION 34, ACT NO. 79 OF THE 2011-12 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

June 19, 2015

## INTRODUCTION

This Report is required by Section 34 of Act. No. 79 of the 2011 – 2012 General Assembly which appropriated to the Office of Attorney General funds to continue a training program for law enforcement officers in their interactions with persons exhibiting mental health conditions. Pursuant to Section 34, the Office shall provide a progress report as to the expenditure of the funds and the status of the training effort. The Report shall be submitted to the Secretary of Administration and the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. The Act 79 appropriation was a continuation of the funding provided in Section 13 of Act No. 80 funding appropriated in the 2003 -2004 General Assembly for the same training purpose.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Pursuant to Act No. 79 of the 2011- 2012 General Assembly, the Attorney General's Office was assigned the following responsibilities and appropriation:

Sec. 34. Protection to persons and property - Attorney general

(a) Of the above general fund appropriation, \$20,000.00 is appropriated to the office of the attorney general to establish a training program for selected law enforcement officers to assist them, during the performance of their duties, in their interactions with persons exhibiting mental health conditions.

(1) The office of the attorney general shall, in consultation with the Vermont coalition for disability rights and other organizations, design and implement this training program.

(2) By January 15 of each year and until funds are fully expended, the attorney general shall submit to the secretary of administration and the house and senate committees on appropriations a report summarizing how the funds have been used and how the trainings have progressed.

(3) Unexpended funds shall be carried forward and used for the purpose of this subsection in future years.

## ACTIONS TAKEN

In response to the original Act No. 80, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) initially consulted with the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council (VCJTC), the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights (VCDR) and the Vermont Department of Mental Health. These groups created the Act 80 Advisory Group to design and implement the training program. The Act 80 Advisory Group is a multi-disciplinary group that includes state employees, law enforcement, non-profit organizations, mental health professionals, advocates and members of the public. We recognize and honor each partner's unique and valuable expertise and contribution to this training partnership and thank them for their dedication to this effort. These same partners will continue to act as the Act 80/Act 79 Advisory Group.

The Advisory Group meetings are coordinated by the Attorney General's Office and a list of the members of the Act 80/Act 79 Advisory Group is attached as Appendix A.

The original Act 80 Advisory Group also created a Curriculum Committee, which was charged with the task of drafting the training curriculum, and designing and implementing the training plan. The members of the original Curriculum Committee are listed as Appendix B. This Committee completed the curriculum in 2006 and trainings commenced in May of that year. Since that time, the Curriculum Committee has not met. The Act 80 Group thanks the Curriculum Committee members for their critical contribution to these trainings.

Since May of 2006, the basic awareness training "Interacting with People Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis" has been offered to all Vermont law enforcement. Originally the course was 6 hours. In 2009, full-time certified officers began receiving an expanded course (8 hours). In 2013, the in-service offering was also expanded to 8 hours. In 2014, the training became mandatory for Vermont law enforcement and specifically required as a prerequisite to becoming certified in operation of a Conducted Electrical Weapon (CEW).

As of May 7, 2015, 65% of all Vermont law enforcement agencies' certified personnel have attended the course. Another 2% of officers who work in the Northwest part of the state (Franklin County Sheriffs' Office, St. Albans City Police and Swanton Police) have participated in "Mental Health First Aid" training and have requested the Council accept that course as an equivalent. Northwestern Counseling & Support Services have facilitated this training with support from the Department of Mental Health.

In addition, since 2006, many dispatchers and several constables, federal officers and crisis screeners have attended the training. Other agencies have requested this training for 2015, and VCJTC staff have been working with Washington County Sheriff's Department, Stowe Police, Chittenden County Sheriff's Department and several others to train their personnel over the course of the next year. See Appendix C for a breakdown of attendance by police agency.

In 2014, the Act 80 Advisory Group engaged in ongoing discussion and review of the content of Act 80 training and its relationship to similar concurrent trainings offered. Specifically, the group discussed the "Team Two Training" and training occurring at hospitals, in order to insure consistency, eliminate contradictory messages, and cross-coordinate training locations and scheduling.

The Attorney General's Office continues to act as the delegated authority for the management of \$20,000.00 appropriated in Sec. 34 of Act 79 of the 2012 Legislative Session. These funds are to be used for assisting law enforcement officers during the performance of their duties in their interactions with persons exhibiting mental health conditions. In light of this objective, the Act 80 Advisory Group decided to contract in 2015 with the Crime Research Group, Inc., to design and carry out an evaluation of the

effectiveness of the Act 80 training. The Attorney General's Office is tracking all expenditures for this appropriation. Sec. 34 provides authorization to carry the balance of the amount forward in order for it to be used for the implementation of the appropriate training programs. No funds were expended in 2014; however, an estimated \$14,754 will be spent in 2015 under the terms of the contract with Crime Research Group.

Going forward, the VCJTC will continue to plan, present and administer the trainings. The Attorney General's Office will continue to coordinate and assist the Act 80 Advisory Group in its role.

## **TRAINING PLAN**

The goal of the Act 80/Act 79 project is to improve police officers' competency in responding to people with mental illness by providing high quality, comprehensive, affordable and convenient training.

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. Continue to identify evolving specific training needs.
2. Evaluate and refine the current comprehensive curriculum.
3. Continue to offer high quality training that is affordable and convenient to all police officers in Vermont.
4. Continue to support a model training program which is now part of the VCJTC standard in-service course offerings.

### **Current Comprehensive Curriculum**

The eight-hour training program is aimed at meeting the following training goals:

- to increase officers' awareness of issues regarding interaction with people who have psychiatric and/or developmental disabilities.
- to provide officers with tools to assist them in de-escalating people in crisis. The following issues are emphasized:
  - maximize officer and civilian safety,
  - increase the officer's effectiveness,
  - increase the officer's professionalism, and
  - decrease civilian complaints and civil liability issues.
- Recognizing that a person's credibility is sometimes questioned based on his or her disability, this training is designed to increase an officer's awareness of the issues around stereotypes and stigma. Verbal and non-verbal communication skills are stressed (demonstrating active listening skills; being clear and concise; thinking of alternative ways to communicate with people who may have temporary or permanent cognitive difficulty; etc.).

- To also train officers on:
  - mental health conditions/disorders,
  - recognition of a disability,
  - Vermont laws related to mental health treatment and voluntary and involuntary hospitalization procedures,
  - Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended in 2009
  - the roles of the mental health system and the police, and
  - state and local resources.

The leaders of this project felt strongly that stakeholders with a wide array of perspectives should participate and that individuals who have been diagnosed with a psychiatric disability must be included in order for the training to be of the highest quality. These individuals' perspectives on issues such as stereotypes, stigma, involuntary treatment and legal issues are invaluable. The involvement of Peer Education Program Staff from Washington County Mental Health Services has been very well received. The Staff present on their experiences with mental illness and how it has affected their lives, any positive or negative experience they have had with police, suggestions for how to have the most positive interactions, and also answer any questions that students have. We are tremendously grateful for the peer educators' participation and their perspective has been crucial to the success of these trainings.

The Act 80/Act 79 Advisory Groups are very appreciative of the support and commitment demonstrated by the VCJTC and the law enforcement community to these critical trainings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In 2014, the Act 80 Advisory Group met in July and October. The group focused on implementing its 2013 recommendation to determine the effectiveness of the current training. The Advisory Group also engaged in extensive discussions on how best to further the goals of the Act 80 training and, based on those discussions, made the following recommendations.

1. Use appropriated funds to contract with Crime Research Group, Inc. to design and carry out an evaluation of the current training program.
2. Form a working group, within the Act 80 Advisory group, to aid Crime Research Group in the design and implementation of this evaluation.
3. Once results of the study are complete in December 2015, identify areas for adjustment and improvement of the training curriculum.
4. Continue to engage community partners, including peers, to encompass broader feedback on the Act 80 training.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Office of the Attorney General and the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council are honored to have this opportunity to administer these critical trainings and funds. We welcome advice from the Administration, the Legislature, and the public on the development and implementation of these trainings.

## **APPENDIX A**

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## **APPENDIX C**

### **Vermont Officers by Agency Who Have Received Act 80 Training**

***Please note: This does not include individuals trained who have left Vermont law enforcement, nor does it include officers who have received mental health response training elsewhere.***

<b>Agency Name</b>	<b>Total Trained</b>	<b>Total Employees</b>	<b>Percent Trained</b>
Addison County Sheriff's Office	4	13	31%
Barre City Police Department	22	33	67%
Barre Town Police Department	11	16	69%
Bellows Falls Police Department	4	14	29%
Bennington County Sheriff's Office	19	30	63%
Bennington Police Department	21	27	78%
Berlin Police Department	10	10	100%
Bradford Police Department	4	4	100%
Brandon Police Department	6	9	67%
Battleboro Police Department	24	24	100%
Brighton Police Department	1	2	50%
Bristol Police Department	3	6	50%
Burlington Police Department	94	100	94%
Caledonia County Sheriff's Office	9	17	53%
Canon Police Department	1	1	100%
Capitol Police Department	4	5	80%
Castleton Police Department	4	10	40%
Chester Police Department	1	7	14%
Chittenden County Sheriff's Office	10	29	34%
Colchester Police Department	7	29	24%
Dover Police Department	4	8	50%
Essex County Sheriff's Office	10	17	59%
Essex Police Department	13	31	42%
Fair Haven Police Department	2	13	15%
Fairlee Police Department	1	1	100%
Franklin County Sheriff's Office	7	29	24%
Grand Isle County Sheriff's Office	4	12	33%
Hardwick Police Department	7	8	88%
Hartford Police Department	16	21	76%
Hinesburg Community Police	3	8	38%
Killington Police Department	1	3	33%
Lamoille County Sheriff's Office	13	30	43%

Ludlow Police Department	4	8	50%
Lyndonville Police Department	3	3	100%
Manchester Police Department	7	12	58%
Middlebury Police Department	8	15	53%
Milton Police Department	12	20	60%
Montpelier Police Department	15	20	75%
Morristown Police Department	6	12	50%
Mount Tabor Police Department	1	2	50%
Newport Police Department	7	16	44%
Northfield Police Department	9	11	82%
Norwich Police Department	4	6	67%
Orange County Sheriff's Office	18	26	69%
Orleans County Sheriff's Office	8	23	35%
Pittsford Police Department	3	8	38%
Randolph Police Department	9	9	100%
Richmond Police Department	6	7	86%
Royalton Police Department	3	3	100%
Rutland City Police Department	23	33	70%
Rutland County Sheriff's Office	7	23	30%
Rutland Town Police Department	1	5	20%
Shelburne Police Department	11	18	61%
South Burlington Police Depart.	38	39	97%
Springfield Police Department	8	15	53%
St. Albans Police Department	14	22	64%
St. Johnsbury Police Department	6	15	40%
Stowe Police Department	5	21	24%
Swanton Police Department	7	15	47%
Thetford Police Department	4	5	80%
UVM Police Services	13	20	65%
Vergennes Police Department	3	9	33%
Vermont State Police	329	335	98%
VT Attorney General's Office	0	4	0%
VT Department of Fish & Wildlife	37	49	76%
VT Department of Liquor Control	4	16	25%
VT Department of Motor Vehicles	11	28	39%
VT Secretary of State	1	5	20%
Washington County Sheriff's Office	22	35	63%
Waterbury Police Department	3	8	38%
Weathersfield Police Department	2	5	40%
Williston Police Department	9	16	56%



Wilmington Police Department	3	6	50%
Windham County Sheriff's Office	12	37	32%
Windsor County Sheriff's Office	6	14	43%
Windsor Police Department	3	11	27%
Winhall Police Department	5	14	36%
Winooski Police Department	14	24	58%
Woodstock Police Department	5	10	50%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1073</b>	<b>1646</b>	<b>65%</b>