

**VERMONT ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE**  
**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**2018**

**I. MISSION STATEMENT:**

It is the Vermont AGO's mission to: protect and promote the health and safety of all Vermonters by providing independent legal counsel and representation to the State of Vermont.

**II. VALUES**

Values to accomplishing the mission include:

- A. Dedication to public service.
- B. Quality and excellence in work.
- C. Professionalism and integrity.
- D. Innovation and creative problem solving.
- E. A supportive work environment that enables people to do their jobs effectively and efficiently.

**III. STRATEGIC ISSUES**

- A. Developing and retaining a high performing workforce.
- B. Protecting Vermonter's civil rights, the environment, and consumers.
- C. Enhancing communications.
- D. Responding to the opioid crisis.
- E. Protecting vulnerable Vermonters.
- F. Promoting criminal justice reform.
- G. Addressing lack of trust in government.

**IV. STRATEGIC PLAN**

**Strategic Issue 1, Developing and Retaining A High Performing Workforce.**

The development and retention of a high performing work force, both attorneys and support staff, are essential to the AGO. Challenges in achieving this goal include

limited financial resources to pay competitive salaries and the distance to Montpelier from major population centers. The AGO strives to be an employer that provides a healthy and supportive work environment, cultivates diversity, and supports employees so they can perform at the highest level.

Goals and Action Steps:

- a. Provide meaningful opportunities for professional development and training for both attorneys and support staff including: (i) continuing in-house CLEs with faculty from within and outside the AGO; (ii) widely distributing NAAG training opportunities; (iii) granting leave for employees to serve as faculty at national NAAG trainings; (iv) promoting college credit opportunities relevant to work at the AGO, which are available through the Department of Human Resources; (v) supporting memberships in professional organizations that promote the development of attorneys and support staff (e.g., continued payment of VBA dues).
- b. Recognize excellence by attorneys and support staff including: (i) the annual Andros award for the unsung hero; (ii) periodic newsletters and office-wide e-mails from the front office; and (iii) informal visits with individuals at the Pavilion and off-site units including AHS, Tax, and AOT.
- c. Foster leadership opportunities within the existing management structure including experiences as lead counsel in complex litigation, handling appeals to the supreme court, offering opportunities for diverse legal experiences across divisions, mentoring, and expanding responsibilities for professionals in their respective areas of expertise.
- d. Support the development of a parent-friendly work place, including following best practices for supporting nursing mothers and access to child care facilities.
- e. Promote and develop a diverse workplace by recruiting and hiring employees from different backgrounds and experiences, and provide regular/periodic training to prevent harassment and implicit bias.
- f. Engage employees on a periodic basis about their thoughts and opinions concerning workplace conditions and performance.
- g. Explore opportunities to expand remote access work stations (e.g., virtual private network and telecommuting procedures) for both attorneys and support staff.

- h. Support expansion of work/office space in Chittenden County, Vermont's major population center.
- i. Support access to fleet vehicles and parking in Montpelier.
- j. Move AHS legal team budget to the AGO to insure equity amongst AAGs and support staff.

**Strategic Issue 2, Protecting Vermonters' Civil Rights, the Environment, and Consumers.**

Changes within the federal government have required states, including Vermont, to take on increased responsibility to protect civil rights, the environment, and consumers. The AGO has broad responsibilities for protecting Vermonters' rights to clean air and water, to live and work free of discrimination, and access the marketplace free of deception or unfair trade practices. While meeting these public needs are the essence of our mission, the AGO has limited resources to provide such services.

**Goals and Action Steps:**

- a. Use the Attorney General's bully pulpit to speak out unequivocally to protect Vermonters' civil rights, ensure access to clean air and water, and educate consumers and businesses about unfair and deceptive business practices.
- b. Choose cases that are consistent with values and priorities of the Attorney General, including the development of division guidelines for case selection and responding to "sign-on" requests from other state attorneys general.
- c. Leverage resources by: (i) creating multi-disciplinary teams within the AGO to work on complex cases or other matters reflecting the priorities of the office; (ii) working collaboratively within multi-state efforts to address priorities of the office and responding to challenges created by the changing relationship with the federal government; and (iii) looking for opportunities to cultivate multi-partisanship in areas of mutual interest (e.g., elder abuse and expanded jurisdiction of Medicaid fraud units).
- d. Advocate for a sustainable budget from the Legislature and pursue grant funding opportunities to expand operations consistent with strategic goals.

- e. Communicate frequently with stakeholders throughout the state to be responsive to the needs of the state as an institution and the people of Vermont. This includes regular meetings with agency clients, county state's attorneys, constituent and community organizations, legal organizations, and a continuation of community service projects.
- f. Foster innovation and creative ideas for the efficient delivery of legal services. This includes using alternatives to litigation to achieve policy goals; e.g., education, building cultures of compliance within businesses, and focusing "impact litigation" with policy initiatives and public education.
- g. Utilize office systems, such as case management systems, to evaluate attorney case-loads and make appropriate technological resources available to meet the operational needs of the AGO.
- h. Defend the State of Vermont and pursue damages and penalty cases in a fair and equitable manner.

### **Strategic Issue 3, Enhancing Communications.**

Effective communications are a necessary component of the Attorney General's Office. They encourage public trust, facilitate efficient internal operations, and ensure responsiveness to constituent needs. The AGO should approach external communications with a "customer service" mindset to provide prompt responses to constituent requests and in a manner consistent with our professional obligations as lawyers for the State of Vermont.

#### **Goals and Action Steps:**

- a. Create a front office position with primary responsibility for external communications, and constituent services and relations.
- b. Create standardized procedures for: (i) responding to press inquiries; (ii) drafting press releases; (iii) organizing media events; and (iv) responding to constituent requests.
- c. Increase frequency of front office communications that provide updates on office priorities and the Attorney General's activities.

- d. Develop and operate an updated and accessible website and utilize social media for external communications.
- e. Create and operate an office intranet to address communications needs, serve as a resource to provide updates on office-wide developments, news, and legal updates, and house AGO lawyer and staff bios that identify respective areas of expertise.
- f. Expand office-wide mixers to provide greater opportunities for inter-division communications.
- g. Foster amicable and responsive relationship with Vermont press corps that includes prompt replies in a manner that balances the need for immediate comment and a considered response.

**Strategic Issue 4, Responding to the Opioid Crisis.**

Vermont has been plagued with an opioid crisis that destroys life, families, and our communities. Opioids, both prescription and illicit, are the main drivers of drug overdose deaths nationwide and in the State of Vermont. Incidents of overdoses and related deaths are increasing. Vermont has expended significant resources combatting the opioid epidemic, the crime related to it, and drug treatment and rehabilitation associated with opioid abuse. As Vermont’s chief law enforcement officer, the AGO has an important role in addressing this crisis.

Goals and Action Steps:

- a. Investigate and pursue civil actions to hold those responsible for the deceptive marketing, distribution, and sale of opioids.
- b. Continue participation and support for the Opioid Coordination Council.
- c. Create greater understanding about the connection between mental health needs and addiction; and support programs that address the underlying treatment of mental health to reduce self-medication and addiction.
- d. Educate the public about resources to address addiction and the availability of prevention and treatment programs.
- e. Support the Community Justice Unit’s and AHS Division’s efforts to address substance abuse and mental health needs within the educational, social welfare, criminal justice, administrative, and family court systems.

- f. Support the availability of mental health and addiction treatment within correctional settings.
- g. Assist the Drug Task Force on opioid distribution cases.
- h. Support greater access to the Vermont Prescription Drug Monitoring Database by law enforcement to diminish the over-prescription of opioid drugs.

**Strategic Issue 5, Protecting Vulnerable Vermonters.**

As Vermont’s chief legal officer, the AGO has a duty to protect vulnerable Vermonters. This includes children, victims of domestic violence, minorities, and the elderly. The elderly are a significant and growing demographic bloc of Vermont citizens that will require additional focus and resources from the AGO.

Goals and Action Steps:

- a. Develop and implement the Elder Protection Initiative, a task force within the AGO that has participation across divisions and addresses elder needs through: (i) investigation and law enforcement; (ii) public education; (iii) legislative advocacy; (iv) seeking expanded authority under Medicaid laws to investigate elder abuse cases under existing grant funding; and (v) collaboration with other state divisions, such as DAIR, to achieve the goals of Elder Protection Initiative.
- b. Explore opportunities for the AGO to provide pro bono services to support vulnerable Vermonters.
- c. Support efforts to reduce incidents of domestic violence and increase awareness of resources for victims and survivors.
- d. Continue AGO support for broad access to reproductive health and gender equity.
- e. Support efforts for firearm background checks and other reasonable gun safety legislation.
- f. Protect vulnerable minority communities through robust enforcement of civil rights laws under our jurisdiction.
- g. Pursue the vigorous prosecution of violent crimes.

## **Strategic Issue 6, Promoting Criminal Justice Reform.**

Vermonters deserve a criminal and youth justice system that protects public safety, addresses victims' needs, and promotes fairness and equal treatment. To meet this goal, our system should address the root causes of unlawful behavior, better serve individuals suffering from mental illness or substance use disorders who come in contact with the system, ensure that victims have voice and choice regarding their case, and address the unequal involvement and outcomes on the basis of race that are well documented in Vermont's criminal and youth justice system. Everyone in the state should have equal access to alternative justice programs, like diversion and pretrial services, and to mental health and substance use treatment that enhance our collective public safety.

### Goals and Action Steps:

- a. Streamline the delivery of alternative justice programming by consolidating AGO funding for services so that one agency provides services within one county; collaborate with other alternative justice programs and treatment service providers as a criterion in the selection of AGO-funded providers; and continue to partner with AHS to establish training expectations for providers.
- b. Ensure consistency and professionalism in our services by setting clear guidelines and accountability for provider agencies both through handbooks and contract terms.
- c. Educate prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, and the public about the benefits and availability of restorative justice and other alternatives.
- d. Ensure access to mental health and substance use treatment by creating and supporting long-term institutional connections between AGO service providers and local healthcare providers.
- e. Support the Racial Disparities Panel and other groups working to end racial inequality in our system.
- f. Fairly and thoroughly investigate criminal excessive force and police shooting cases; continue support for the Mental Health Crisis Response Commission and other entities tackling the challenge of appropriately dealing with people with mental illness whose behavior brings them to the attention of law enforcement.
- g. Support and advocate for legislation and policies that promote criminal justice reform, such as bail reform, expanded criteria for expungements, increased

access to medical treatment, use of evidence-based risk assessments, and agency data sharing.

**Strategic Issue 7, Addressing Lack of Trust In Government.**

Public service requires the promotion of the public trust in government by operating the AGO in a manner that is transparent, but consistent with our professional obligations.

Goals and Action Steps:

- a. Continue to provide a superior level of legal services to our client agencies, the public, and the State of Vermont.
- b. Educate the public about our role as lawyers for the State of Vermont. E.g., spotlight the good work of the AGO through communications, an enhanced website, social media, and public outreach programs.
- c. Engage in outreach to solve constituent problems, including the state as an institution, small businesses, and the people of Vermont. E.g., community service projects, public outreach programs, and frequent face-to-face interaction with client agencies.
- d. Engage in outreach to the legal community and the bar about opportunities to enforce civil rights, public protection, and environmental laws.
- e. Provide public access to public record requests and responses by publishing them on the AGO website.
- f. Work with small businesses to create a culture of compliance with Vermont laws and regulations; serve as a resource to small businesses looking for consumer assistance; and continue efforts of small business advocate.
- g. Communicate with the press corps to inform the community of the AGO's work to protect and defend Vermonters.