



# Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

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Dear Members of the Joint Fiscal Committee,

We are writing you to express our deep concern about the proposed cut to Prevent Child Abuse Vermont's Sexual Abuse Free Environment for Teens (SAFE-T) Program. The SAFE-T Program is a proven effective school-based sexual abuse prevention program currently used by almost half of Vermont's middle schools. (For more information about the program, please visit [www.pcavt.org](http://www.pcavt.org).) Without access to this program, many Vermont schools will be without the resources, training, and support needed to respond to the Act One mandate, putting children and youth at greater risk of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse is the most prevalent form of child abuse in Vermont representing 42% of all founded cases. Data from the Department for Children and Families shows that 372 children were confirmed to have been sexually abused in Vermont in 2013 (VT DCF, 2013). Given what we know about the lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse, it is critical that proven effective primary prevention continue and that the State follow through on its commitment to children as demonstrated by the Act One legislation.

If the proposed funding cuts occur, Prevent Child Abuse Vermont's ability to support schools in their adoption and use of the SAFE-T Program will be limited. The proposed cuts represent training and support of up to **six schools, including approximately 240 youth as well as all school faculty, staff, and parents**. Without these funds, students will not have access to prevention programming that includes both victim and victimizer prevention. Prevention programming that addresses the realities of child to child sexual abuse is critical to reducing incidents given that 38% of substantiated child sexual abuse cases in Vermont in 2013 were committed by minors (under age 20). Without prevention programming that focuses on helping youth develop healthy relationship skills, Vermont youth will be at increased risk for sexual victimization and perpetration.

The SAFE-T Program continues to demonstrate **statistically significant** results in helping youth increase their knowledge of child sexual abuse. This is an important marker of program effectiveness given that misinformation about issues related to abusive behaviors and consent are strong risk factors for acting in sexually harmful ways.

We encourage you to consider what this cut will mean to the children and youth of Vermont. Please do not hesitate to contact us (phone 802-229-5724; email [ljohnson@pcavt.org](mailto:ljohnson@pcavt.org)) with any questions or to get more information. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda E. Johnson  
Executive Director

Johanna Straavaldsen  
Youth Sexual Abuse Prevention Manager

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