



Vermont State Employees' Association

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Patricia Gabel, Court Administrator
Vermont Supreme Court
109 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05609

Re: Court Security and Emergency Preparedness Committees

Dear Pat,

We are sure that you have been as shocked and saddened as us about the recent spate of violence in our state facilities. As we have engaged in conversations with our colleagues about these incidents and how to prevent them we have found that one concern is shared by many – improving communication. That is why we applaud the Judiciary for instituting the Court Security and Emergency Planning Committees (CSEPC) in each Court Unit, and why we are writing today to ask to be included in that discussion.

The Court Administrator's Office has described how the CSEPC membership should include all stakeholders. This is consistent with the recommendation of the NSCS which states that "A formalized interagency security committee would provide a means for the courts, the prosecuting attorney's offices, county officials, sheriff deputies, and other judicial stakeholders to take a more comprehensive and structured approach in addressing matters of security in each of the courthouses." (NCSC Overview of Courthouse Security Assessments, p. 5). As the leadership of our union's Judiciary Bargaining Unit, we feel that your employees' represent another stakeholder, and that their input in this process is valuable.

At our last Labor / Management meeting in September, our team asked whether management would consider allowing an employee from the bargaining unit to take part in each unit's CSEPC alongside other stakeholders. The answer that our team received was that each Superior Court Clerk could make this decision for her own Unit(s). We know that this model is already working well in Addison County, where employees have asked to take part and management has granted that request. In that case, there was some concern that the legislature's mandate for a Court Security Report dictated who could take part in the CSEPC (Sec. E.204.14 "Court Security; Report"), however, we found out that that language only concerns the creation of the report, and not the ongoing discussions and work of the CSEPC committee itself.

We would like to ask you if you would please allow your employees in the Supreme Court to select someone from within the VSEA bargaining unit to take part in your local CSEPC.

Whether in the courtroom, in our offices or at the counter, we work directly with the public who utilize our services, and so have a deep understanding of what are potential security concerns. Frontline staff interact with individuals from other stakeholder agencies and can provide insight into current relevant practices and procedures. An employee participant can also be vital in ensuring that all staff know and understand the work of the CSEPC and the changes that it institutes.

We hope that your employees can have a seat at the table for the important work of your CSEPC. We all have a lot of work ahead of us to address pressing safety concerns in our workplaces. This is the type of issue where collaboration among all stakeholders is not just beneficial, but is vital.

Sincerely,

The VSEA Judiciary Unit Executive Committee

Margaret Crowley, Chair

Beth Aiken, Vice Chair

Nicole Burdick, Secretary-Treasurer

Evan Hill

Dave Wortheim