VERMONT

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Agency of Human Services

To: The Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

From: Lindsay Barron, Director of Policy & Planning, Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division (DCF-FSD)

Date: March 11, 2026

Subject: S. 239 - An act relating to the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Working Group

I appreciate the opportunity to testify and share the insights of the Family Services Division regarding S.239. FSD supports S.239 and the creation of the proposed working group to review Vermont's child abuse and neglect reporting statutes.

FSD's mission is grounded in an unwavering commitment to child safety. We look forward to participating in the working group and sharing the perspectives of FSD staff, relevant research and information from other states, and feedback we have historically received about this area of our work. We know our work is never done and we must continuously evaluate and improve our statutes, rules, policies, and practices as child protection practice evolves.

As the Committee considers the structure of the working group, we respectfully offer several considerations.

Federal alignment: Any recommendations should remain consistent with federal requirements under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which establishes minimum standards related to state definitions of abuse and neglect, including physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse or exploitation, and emotional maltreatment. CAPTA also requires states to maintain oversight and review structures, including a state task force and a citizen review panel.

Coordination with existing bodies: To promote efficiency and avoid duplicative work, the Committee may wish to consider leveraging the work of the Children's Justice Act Task Force and the Vermont Citizens Advisory Board (VCAB), which serves as Vermont's CAPTA citizen review panel. Both bodies already convene multidisciplinary partners to examine and strengthen Vermont's child protection system.

The Children's Justice Act Task Force has recently served as the primary forum for analysis and stakeholder engagement related to Act 154 of 2024 (An act relating to child abuse and neglect investigation and substantiation standards and procedures) — systems reform work that FSD is still actively implementing. We also note that Vermont is currently implementing significant reforms related to the Child Protection Registry under Act 154, and the working group may be convening

while those changes are still in the early stages of implementation and before their full impact can be understood.

FSD has also scheduled a special meeting of the Children's Justice Act Task Force to bring members up to speed on the origins of this bill and the work it proposes.

Stakeholder representation: To ensure a comprehensive, balanced, and informed review, we respectfully recommend that the working group include additional representation from organizations and partners who bring important expertise in this area, including:

- Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate (OCYFA)
- Vermont Children's Alliance and representation from Child Advocacy Centers (CACs)
- Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs
- KidSafe Collaborative
- Voices for Vermont's Children
- Vermont Parent Representation Center (VPRC)
- Prevent Child Abuse Vermont (PCAV)
- Medical partners, such as the University of Vermont's Child Safe Program
- Individuals with lived experience as child victims of abuse and neglect
- More than one representative from the Family Services Division

Timeline: The Committee may also wish to consider a slightly later report deadline. Rather than November 2026, a deadline of January 2027 may allow additional time for stakeholder engagement, research, and thoughtful analysis.

In closing, we are grateful for the Committee's dedication to enhancing the safety and welfare of Vermont's children and families, and we look forward to collaborating further as the bill moves forward.