



MEMO From the Office of the Town Manager

To: Colchester Selectboard
From: Aaron Frank, Town Manager
Ruby Tetrick, Communications Coordinator
Date: April 1, 2025
Re: Consolidation of Community Justice Services

This memo will briefly explain current Community Justice Services, Legislative Changes, Reentry Services, and Pre-Charge Services, and the Future of Community Justice Services.

Current Community Justice Services: The Colchester Police Department partners with the Essex Community Justice Center (ECJC) to provide restorative justice to the community. The goal of restorative justice is to give an alternative route for cases, rather than prosecution and the traditional criminal legal system. Restorative justice keeps the focus on “who was harmed” and “how can the harm be repaired” instead of “who did it” and “what should we do to them”. ECJC does this by allowing law enforcement officials to refer low-level offenders to their pre-charge program. In this program, outreach is done to all victims/harmed parties and those responsible for the harm will go in front of panels comprised of trained community volunteers and are held accountable for their actions through the creation of an Agreement that addresses the harm caused and ways to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. ECJC also offers reentry services for individuals returning to their communities after incarceration. ECJC is funded with state grants and ongoing operating funds from the Towns of Colchester and Essex.

Legislative Changes: Chittenden County has four community justice centers. The Vermont State legislature passed a bill in 2024 to consolidate community justice with one center in each county and which may provide some administrative efficiencies for the State and could improve community justice in other counties where there are fewer services. For ECJC, we will see changes to the way its restorative justice programs are funded and are set to consolidate some of the services it provides to our community.

Re-Entry Services: ECJC’s reentry program currently receives funding from the Vermont Department of Corrections. Starting in Fiscal Year 2026, the Department of Corrections is opting to have a single entity provide reentry support programs for Chittenden County and will end funding to ECJC’s program. This funding has been awarded to the City of Burlington’s Community Justice Center and the Burlington CJC will provide re-entry services beginning in July 2025.

Pre- Charge Services: Also beginning in Fiscal Year 2026, the ECJC’s pre-charge program will receive funding and oversight from the Attorney General’s Office instead of the Department of Corrections. Effective at the start of Fiscal Year 2027, pre-charge funding will only be provided to the Burlington Community Justice Center. Following this change, the City of Burlington and

the Attorney General's Office have indicated that they support operating pre-charge programs locally in Chittenden County towns. The details of this plan are still in the works.

Future: The Colchester Selectboard has asked for the programs to continue to remain community-based. Additional information on this matter is attached.

Hello ECJC Volunteers, Community Advisory Board Members and Community Partners,

As a result of some legislative activity and changes last legislative session there are some significant changes coming up that I wanted to let you know about. We don't have all of the answers/details at this time but I wanted you to hear what we know as soon as we were in a position to be able to share where things are now.

The first change is that effective 7/1/25 the "Pre-Charge" Restorative Justice Panel Program we have been operating, with referrals coming directly from law enforcement and which has been funded by the VT Department of Corrections (VTDOC), will be shifting to the Attorney General's Office (AGO), both in terms of funding and oversight. Initially we were unsure of how the funding of the program might look for this coming year (FY26, from 7/1/25-6/30/26), but we have now been told that funding will come directly to the ECJC from the AGO. The AGO has made a budget recommendation that would have no impact on staffing for the Pre-Charge RJ Panel Program at the Essex CJC. Final approval of the budget needs to come from the Legislature, but we expect that on the ground, things will look very much the same as they do now through at least 6/30/26, with Susanna and Michelle and our 25 amazing community volunteers running panels and restorative justice processes weekly as they have been doing all along.

Effective 7/1/26 (for FY27), we are being told that all funding for the pre-charge program will likely go from the AGO to the Burlington CJC only. The AGO and Burlington have indicated support for continuing the delivery of the Pre-Charge RJ Panel Program locally in Essex, Colchester, Milton and other Chittenden County towns, although the details of what that will look like have yet to be determined. We anticipate working with the Burlington CJC over the next 15 months to plan for the best transition possible. Our hope is that ECJC staff will continue to do this work. We will keep you apprised of any upcoming changes and decisions that are made along the way.

The second, and more immediate change is that effective 7/1/25 the Essex CJC will no longer receive any funding from the VTDOC. They made a decision in the fall to only fund one entity per AHS District effective 7/1/25, and Essex is not expecting to receive any funding. As a result, ECJC will no longer be providing any of the following services as of 7/1/25:

- Reentry support to people reentering their communities from incarceration
- Running a portion of the Circles of Support & Accountability program (CoSA) for Chittenden County, or
- Doing any work inside the women's prison as we have been for the last 2 years

This sadly does have an impact on staffing and volunteers at the ECJC. Our Reentry Coordinator of just over 1 year, Stacy Jones, will no longer have employment with the ECJC. She is aware of this and has begun conversations with the volunteers and clients she is working with to plan for this transition. We currently have around 15 active CoSA Volunteers who we will be working with to support transferring them to the Burlington CJC to continue serving on CoSAs or stepping down from being a CoSA Volunteer.

We know that these are big changes and that they may impact you, our staff team, and our community partners. Our plan is to keep you updated as things become more clear. We may plan to schedule an evening for folks to come to the CJC for more details or to ask questions if there is an interest. Let us know if this is something you would like to see happen. We also plan to hold our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event in June of this year

before the changes begin taking effect. In the meantime, thank you for your continued support as these transitions begin.

Best,

Jill Evans, Director ([she/her](#))

Essex Community Justice Center

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Essex Junction, VT 05452

jevans@essex.org

www.essexjc.org

Office (802)876-6791





Town of Essex
81 Main Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452

802.878.1341
www.essexvt.org

March 20, 2025

Dear Aaron, Regina, Amber, John, Paula, Holly, and Brad,

As you are aware, Vermont's Act 180 hopes to provide geographic equity for pre-charge work statewide. To date, pre-charge work has mostly been done only in Chittenden County. Act 180 will also transform the funding model for restorative justice in Vermont, and in particular in Chittenden County. Currently, all funding for the Essex Community Justice Center comes from the Vermont Department of Corrections and allows Essex CJC to provide restorative justice in the areas of pre-charge, re-entry, and correctional facility-based work. This letter explains how that will change in these four areas and addresses the future of restorative justice.

Re-entry and facility: Funding for re-entry and facility work will remain with the Department of Corrections. In the area of re-entry and facility work, however, the DOC is not going to fund Essex in FY26. The Essex CJC will stop doing that work as of July 1, 2025. As a result, the Reentry Coordinator position in Essex will be lost. The DOC is moving to have a single entity do the work for the entire county. Burlington submitted an RFP for this work. We expect a future announcement about who will do this work in fiscal year 2026.

Pre-charge: Act 180 set a goal for the state to fund only one entity in each county to do pre-charge work. Because Chittenden County has four CJs (Burlington, Essex, South Burlington, and Williston), we have expected that the restorative justice model in Chittenden County would be changing.

With the start of fiscal year 2026 on July 1, 2025, the bulk of restorative justice funding will come from the Attorney General's Office and will only cover the pre-charge work. For fiscal year 2026, we now know the AGO recommended that each of the four CJs in Chittenden County receive sufficient funding to do pre-charge. The AGO funding for FY26 remains contingent on legislative approval of the budget.

At the Essex CJC, we are confident that we will have sufficient funds to continue to provide pre-charge in Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, Jericho, Milton, Westford, and Underhill. I anticipate that operations will continue much as they do now through June 30, 2026, with Jill Evans, Susanna Weller, Michelle Teegarden, Karen Dolan and our 25 community volunteers running panels and restorative justice processes.

Beginning in FY2027, only Burlington will receive funding for the pre-charge work. Without the state funding, Essex does not plan to continue this work beyond June 30, 2026.

Future of Restorative Justice: Regarding the future delivery model of restorative justice, the AGO and Burlington have indicated support for continuing the delivery of the Pre-Charge Restorative Justice Panel Program locally in Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, Milton and other Chittenden County municipalities. The details still need to

TOWN MANAGER	PARKS AND RECREATION	COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	PUBLIC WORKS	ASSESSOR	FINANCE	TOWN CLERK	LIBRARY	FIRE	POLICE
878-1341	878-1342	878-1343	878-1344	878-1345	878-1359	879-0413	879-0313	878-5308	878-8331

be determined of exactly how the services will be provided. Town and city managers expect to meet with Burlington about the transition, with the hope of making it as smooth as possible for our staff, volunteers, and clients.

Please let me know if you have any questions, and please feel free to share this letter with your respective Selectboards, and City Councils, and staff as you see fit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Duggan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Greg" and last name "Duggan" clearly distinguishable.

Greg Duggan, Town Manager

Cc: Essex Selectboard
Essex Police Chief Ron Hoague
Essex CJC Director Jill Evans

Attachments

- Attorney General's Office plan for pre-charge and post-charge Diversion providers
- Joint Statement from Essex, South Burlington and Williston on the AGO's Decision

January 10, 2025

Dear Honorable Attorney General Clark and Honorable State Senators and Representatives,

Following the adoption of Act 180 in June 2024, we, the leaders of manager organized communities with Community Justice Centers in Chittenden County, write today to respectfully request that you recommend retaining the current organizational structure and allow and fund each of our Centers to continue to provide pre-charge restorative practices to our communities and others in Chittenden County. If that is not possible, we request, that you enable two sites to be funded in Chittenden County and we, as the leaders of the manager led communities, commit to working together over the next year to build one “streamlined” administrative site as the lead and contracted agency in a manager-led community. This could be in addition to a separate site located in the City of Burlington. We believe that one of these two paths forward present the best opportunity for our residents to receive the strong pre-charge support as they experience or perpetrate crime and enable us to build stronger communities.

The communities of South Burlington, Essex, Essex Junction, Williston, Colchester, Shelburne, and Richmond have a long history of providing services in partnership that directly address the needs of our neighbors at the lowest level possible, with restorative practices at the heart of our service delivery, and embedded with our police professionals. Together, we currently operate a shared Community Outreach Team (Howard Center caseworkers embedded in our Police Departments.) We do so with shared funding, governance, and values. It has been successfully operating since 2018.

Not only do we have a proven track record of working in partnership in service delivery, we also share a commitment that the public safety needs of our communities are best met when mental health and restorative practice service providers are embedded directly with our Police Departments. As leaders, we are committed to the belief that public safety and public safety reform is best implemented when our community’s needs are ultimately met with the correct resource either during or soon after an interaction with a police officer. And our restorative justice practitioners help make our first responders stronger and more able. Losing this link between our Police Departments and our pre-charge services will be devastating to the progress we have made over the last decade.

Additionally, our communities have proven track records of addressing low level crimes in a restorative way before they hit the formal justice system. In fact, since the Fall of 2019, our Community Justice Centers have successfully closed 1,234 cases (79% of those that are referred and screened in for services and 64% of the total referred.) Not only does this keep cases out of an incredibly overburdened and underwater court system, it also better serves every person impacted by the event through facilitated and supportive conversations that actively repair the harm done which provides voice to both crime victims and the broader community, and holds the responsible party to account in sensible ways.

Years ago, the State asked communities to lead the way on providing restorative practices at the local level. This was the right decision. We have met that challenge and, as a result, our cultures and practices have changed. Our collective Community Justice Centers are involved with a wide array of programs which include: Community Restorative Justice Panels to address criminal acts; a Conflict Assistance Program to assist with interpersonal conflicts individuals may be facing;

Community Dialogue and Crime Prevention educational programs to address and prevent local crime; a Safe Driving Program to teach participants about the human consequences of unsafe, impaired, and/or distracted driving; and Community Transition, Ongoing Support, Restorative Support, and Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA) programs to provide re-entry services for offenders returning to their community in order to increase community safety and to support these citizens in being active and positive members of their community.

To now take these impactful services away from our local communities for the sake of administrative efficiency feels like we are being punished for our success. How can we continue to modernize and advance how we provide public safety services, if critical tools are taken away from us?

However, we acknowledge that there could be administrative efficiencies. If allowed to and funded to continue to operate in FY26, we, the City and Town Managers, Police Chiefs, and CJC Directors listed below commit to developing a detailed plan in FY26 for the transition of our three sites to one administratively managed site with practitioners embedded in each of our Police Departments in FY27.

Thank you for your consideration. We welcome the opportunity to speak with each of you more about the importance of pre-charge restorative work in our communities in the weeks, months and years to come. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Sincerely,

Served by Essex CJC

Greg Duggan
Essex Town Manager

Regina Mahoney
Essex Junction City
Manager

Aaron Frank
Colchester Town Manager

Ron Hoague
Essex Chief of Police

Roger Fisher
Colchester Acting Chief
of Police

Jill Evans
Essex CJC Director

Served by South Burlington CJC

Jessie Baker
South Burlington City Manager

Matt Lawless
Shelburne Town Manager

Shawn Burke
South Burlington Chief of Police

Michael Thomas
Shelburne Chief of Police

Josef Lavanway
South Burlington CJC Director

Served by Williston CJC

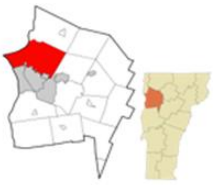
Erik Wells
Williston Town Manager

Josh Arneson
Richmond Town Manager

Patrick Foley
Williston Chief of Police

Anthony Cambridge
Richmond Chief of Police

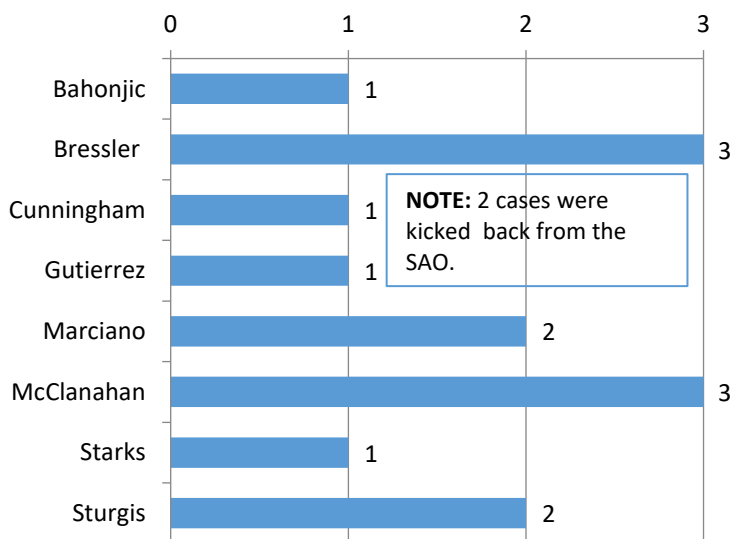
Cristalee McSweeney
Williston CJC Director



Restorative Justice in Colchester

Through a Pre-Charge program, the Colchester Police Department can refer cases to Restorative Justice Panels instead of court. The panels are facilitated by trained community volunteers and serve as a proven and cost-effective means to addressing low level offenses. Through a series of conversations, the panel process holds those responsible for crime accountable for their actions and provides an important opportunity for those affected by crime to share their stories and identify needs for repair.

Number of Colchester PD Referrals by Officer Jul-Dec 2024

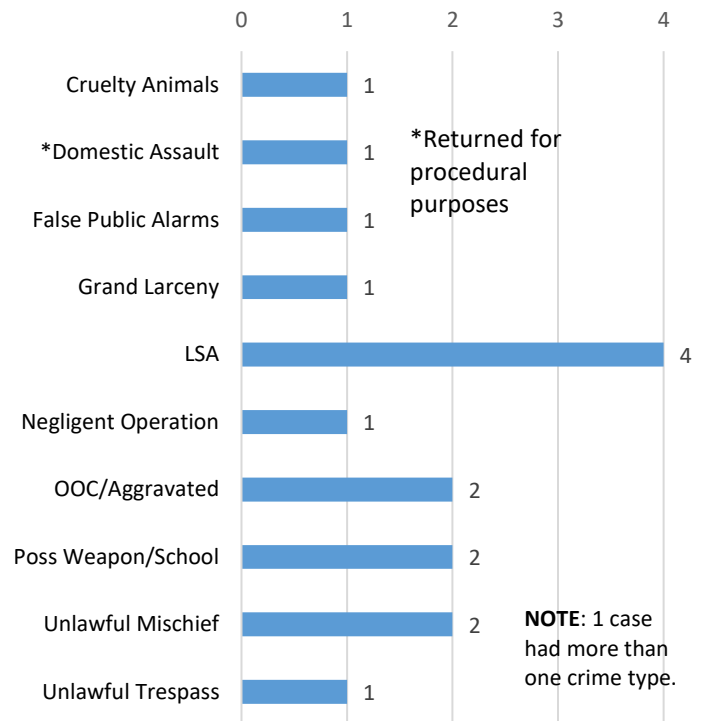


Quote from a Responsible Party:

"I liked that the people on the panel were willing to listen to a lot of aspects of my life. It felt like I actually knew the people on the panel and they knew me too."

"There's nothing that I didn't like and I think this system was really powerful. The length and personal level of the process made it something that is going to last with me a lot longer than a fine."

Colchester PD Direct Referrals by Crime Type Jul-Dec 2024



Community Impact of Referrals from July - December 2024

15 of the new cases had community members and businesses impacted by the crime. Essex CJC staff reached out to all the impacted parties to discuss the referral, explore what they needed, and discuss how they can be involved.

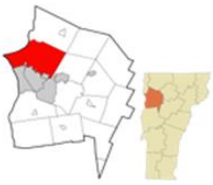
Affected parties from 14 of those cases chose to participate in the restorative justice process involving their situation.

\$2,397 in restitution was resolved through the panel agreement process by those responsible for the crime during this time.

Community volunteers provided **nearly 70 hours of service** through the facilitation of panels in the community.

Cultural Advocates supported the Essex CJC with 2 cases referred by the Colchester PD.

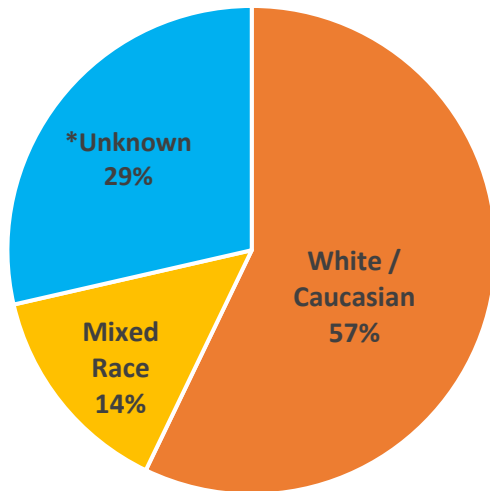




Restorative Justice in Colchester

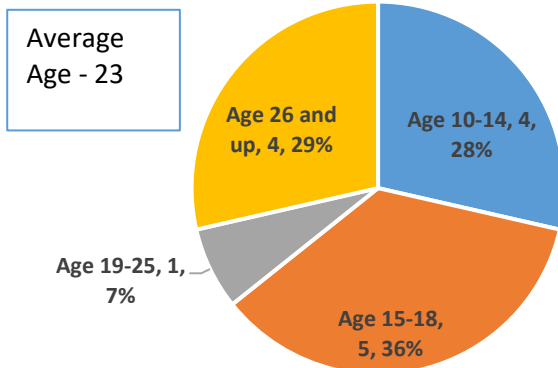
July – December 2024 at a glance

Self-Reported Race / Ethnicity of Colchester PD Referrals Jul-Dec 2024

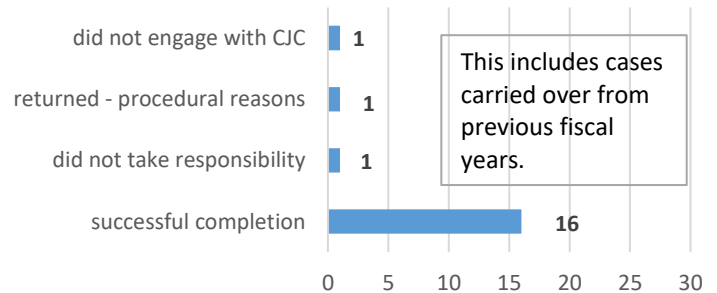


* "Unknown" reflects people who did not respond to CJC outreach, chose not to provide race information, or have not had a CJC meeting yet.

Responsible Party Ages of Colchester PD Direct Referrals Jul-Dec 2024

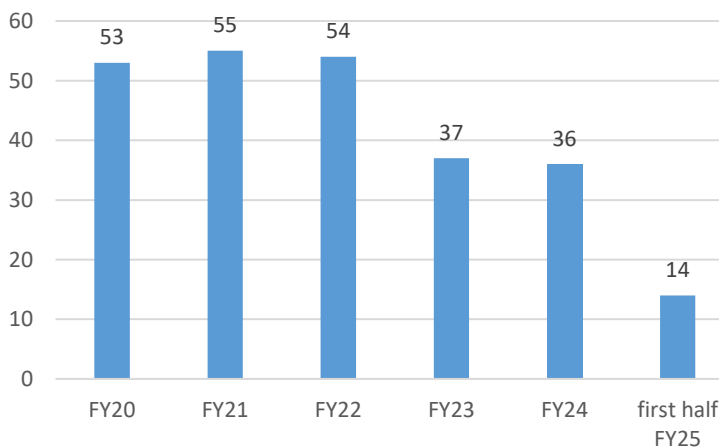


Cases Resolved in Jul-Dec 2024

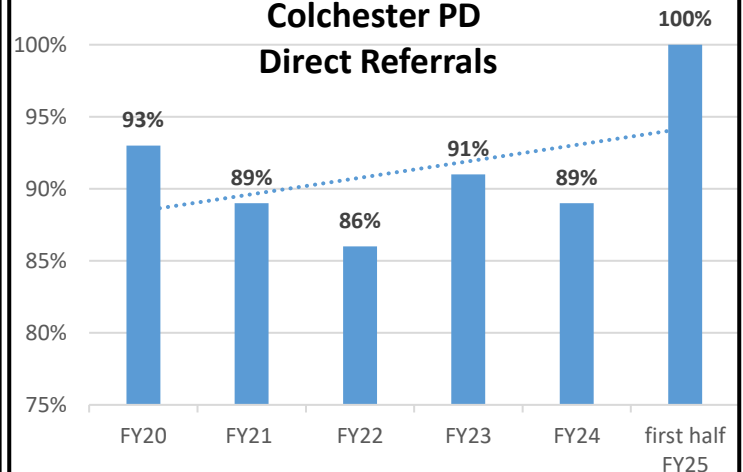


5 Year Trends

Colchester PD Referrals by Fiscal Year



Successful Completions of Colchester PD Direct Referrals





Legislative Update

Topic: *Community Justice Centers*

Request: Do not allow the Community Justice Centers to be dismantled by 2024 legislation. Fund annual cost increases in Community Justice Centers.

Background: The State of Vermont created funding for Community Justice Centers (CJC) with grants to local government, and or non-profits, in 1998 with grants from the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC), which funded both post pre-charge and post-conviction activities. With State funding, [seventeen centers](#) are now operating in Vermont with most serving multiple communities. Over time, the DOC stopped providing annual increases in line with cost increases. The cities and towns which hosted CJC's began contributing their own property tax dollars to avoid having to reduce programming. This has been difficult over time as not all communities who receive CJC services have been willing to fund the communities incurring the costs of "hosting" the CJC's. CJC's serve a number of different purposes and are funded in a [complex manner](#) through a variety of state agencies. *A lack of sustained commitment to an important goal by the State to establish and fund CJC's threatens their continued success.*

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) has, through [Act 180 of 2024](#), directed the AGO: "Beginning on July 1, 2025, the Attorney General shall support the operation of diversion programs in each of the State's counties through grants of financial assistance to, or contracts for services with, a single municipality or organization to provide community-based restorative justice programs and services in each county." Given the population of Chittenden County, our current approach of having some single municipal CJC's (Burlington) and some multi-community CJC's (Essex, Williston, and South Burlington) makes sense. Although a single grant to one community with subgrants to other communities could be allowed, in Chittenden County, communities have resourced public safety quite differently. Our partially decentralized CJC system in Chittenden County is, compared to the overall criminal justice system, quick and effective. Combining under a single entity will cause it to slow down, be less effective and more bureaucratic.

Engaging with CJC's requires a decently staffed and supported police department. Colchester chose to augment our Police Department over decades with: non-sworn Community Service Officers; wellness and peer support for police officers; non-sworn staff and leadership in the department (Evidence/IT) and Support Services Manager; additional sworn officers; Howard community outreach workers; funding of our multi-community CJC (the Essex CJC); and acknowledgment that the Selectboard, the Town's highest elected body is the public oversight board for the Department creating a simple, effective, and accountable chain of responsibility and authority that is transparent to both the voters and police officers. Requiring the consolidation is destructive to our successful community justice services.

Our Local CJC, the [Essex Community Justice Center](#) (ECJC) is funded through the Town of [Colchester's Police Department](#) (CPD) Budget, the Town of Essex, the City of Essex Junction, donations, and a grant from the Vermont Department of Corrections. The ECJC is involved with both pre-charge diversion and post charge actives. Not all of the seventeen Community Justice Centers statewide are involved in both types of activities. The ECJC programs include: Community Restorative Justice Panels to support victims and provide offenders with the opportunity to acknowledge their wrongdoing and to make amends to the community and individuals affected by the crime; a Conflict Assistance Program to assist with interpersonal conflicts individuals may be facing; Community Dialogue and Crime Prevention educational programs to address and prevent local crime; a Safe Driving Program to teach participants about the human consequences of unsafe, impaired, and/or distracted driving; and Community Transition, Ongoing Support, Restorative Support, and Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA) programs to provide re-entry services for offenders returning to their community in order to increase community safety and to support these citizens in being active and positive members of their community. The ECJC is deeply connected, almost imbedded, in the CPD as noted on the [CPD web page](#). ECJC engages with officers directly about offenders, victims, restitution, and community re-entry as noted on this [ECJC report](#) we regularly post on our Police Department web page showing these connections.

Contact: Jill Evans, Essex CJC Director, jevans@ESSEX.ORG, (802) 876-6791; Aaron Frank or Peter Hull