



**Vermont Judiciary Commission on Mental Health and the Courts**  
**Third Annual Report**  
**Executive Summary**

The Commission was established in July 2022 as a Tri-Branch effort to examine the interaction between the judicial and mental health systems and to propose measures to better respond to the needs of court-involved individuals with mental health issues. Each year the Commission prepares and submits to the Vermont Supreme Court a report detailing the Commission's work for the year and recommending an action plan for the next year. This is an Executive Summary of the Commission's Third Annual Report.

Regarding the Commission's work in 2025, the 2025 Action Plan included five recommendations detailed in the Commission's Second Annual Report:

1. Convene a high-level committee to identify a vision for Vermont's growth in the area of mental health and the courts.
2. Plan and implement the three remaining Regional SIM Workshops.
3. Continue the work of the Peer Support Committee.

4. Continue the work of the Committee on Competency Evaluations and Related Issues.
5. Continue trainings associated with mental illness.

The Third Annual Report includes a detailed summary of the status of each of the 2025 Action Plan components. By way of brief summary:

1. D. Scott Acus convened a State-wide Advisory Group to develop recommendations regarding a vision for Vermont's work related to mental health and the courts. The Group produced a comprehensive report entitled "Moving Forward at the Intersection of Justice, Mental Health and Substance Abuse".
2. The remaining three SIM Regional Workshops took place in April and May 2025 and active working groups from those regions meet regularly to achieve local goals established at the workshops.
3. The Peer Support Committee continued its work exploring how to best support peer support services and a variation of that work is encompassed in the 2026 Action Plan involving "System Navigation, Resource Linkage and Peer Support Services".
4. The Competency/Sanity Committee has monitored the significant impact that S.91 (Act 28) has had on competency evaluations including greatly improved timelines for completing competency evaluations and emergency department and hospital wait times.
5. The Committee on Mental Illness and Intellectual Disability Training offered an "Intellectual Disabilities 101" training in January 2025 and a

“Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment within Correctional Facilities” training in March 2025.

The Third Annual Report also includes an overview of the Third Annual Mental Health and the Courts Summit held at the Vermont Statehouse in September 2025. Input and feedback from Summit participants greatly informed the Commission's 2026 Action Plan.

The Third Annual Report includes a 2026 Action Plan with the following recommendations:

1. Strengthen Education, Training and Public Awareness

Topics for potential programs in 2026 will be identified and prioritized with a goal of producing two trainings similar to those produced in previous years. Judges and court staff will receive training on the impact of trauma, grounded in research and national best practices.

2. Improve Cross-System Collaboration

The Judiciary and stakeholders throughout the system of healthcare and human services will regularly and actively engage in strategic discussions on mental health and substance use challenges, education/training opportunities and innovative pilot programs. Feedback loops will be developed between these collaboratives and communities at large. The Commission will also ensure Judiciary participation in statewide meetings that impact mental health and substance use services, policies and practices.

### 3. Support System Navigation, Resource Linkage and Peer Support Services

The Judiciary will support and engage in system navigation/linkage and peer support services for justice-involved individuals. Courts will facilitate and support navigation and linkage by, for example, providing courthouse space where possible to be utilized for warm handoffs to providers following arraignments. With support from Commission staff, courts will build capacity for peer service providers to create stronger pathways to community-based services and supports.

The Third Annual Report will be submitted to the Vermont Supreme Court by year's end for the Court's review and with a request for approval of the 2026 Action Plan.