

## Vermont's 2025-2029 Disaster Plan

The State of Vermont has a statewide comprehensive project for the purpose of developing Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) for each of its state government agencies to ensure Continuity of Government (COG). The State of Vermont selected BOLDplanning.com, a web-based continuity of operations planning system designed to assist government organizations in the COOP development process. The BOLDplanning.com system guides users through each step of the COOP planning process and helps develop a plan that outlines the role and responsibilities required to ensure an organizations ability to transition and continue its operations during times of disruption. The Family Services Division (FSD), along with every other agency, department , division , or office within the state government utilizes this platform for continuity of operations and disaster planning. In the event of a natural disaster or other declared state of emergency, coordination occurs at every level of state government. Within FSD, coordination occurs with eh Agency of Human Services (AHS) and Department for children and Families (DCF).

FSD's disaster plan was updated significantly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, this was previously submitted. There have not been updates to the plan during this past year. The state never enacted the COOP so this plan was not specifically used; however, our plan was utilized in determining our essential services during the pandemic as well as significant planning for each district office should the COOP be enacted.

During the pandemic, there was heavy reliance on the use of virtual contact for both child safety interventions and ongoing case work including face-to-face contacts as permitted under the federal disaster declaration. Virtual work was also relied upon for the business aspects (foster care payments, contracts etc.) and worked well without a significant gap in any essential services. This specific function (the addition of virtual work) has not yet been adopted into the disaster plan but isn't excluded at this time either. When things are more settled, and it is time for another update the utilization of remote/virtual work will be included in our disaster plan.

At the time of the APSR was submitted for review and feedback, Vermont had not been affected by a natural disaster during this past year. On July 13,2023, Governor Phil Scott made a formal request to President Joseph R. Biden for federal disaster fund to assist individuals and communities recover from the catastrophic and historic flood from July 7-12, 2023, which President Joseph R. Biden has approved. Vermont flood resources have been housed on a new website here: <https://www.vermont.gov/flood>.

Seven of FSD's contracted residential treatment programs located in Washington, Windsor, and Lamoille Counties needed to close due to flooding. A total of 26 youth in DCF custody were displaced. Programs are assessing flood damage and whether they will be able to re-open. One will remain closed for several months; that program contained a quarter of FSD's crisis stabilization beds. Spanning several district offices, some foster families with children in DCF custody placed in their homes experienced flood damage and needed to evacuate. Other foster families without placements at the same time experienced damage from the flood. The weekend of July 15-16 set a new peak in describing FSD's reduced capacity to manage the needs of the youth in our case. The increasing trend of relying on the FSD staff to supervise youth in alternative settings resulted in five youth being staffed over the weekend following the flood.

FSD's current disaster plan does not specifically address disparities for marginalized groups, including people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. In the CFSP for FYs 2025-2029, the Chair of FSD's Statewide Racial Equity Workgroup (SREW) will work with the disaster plan lead in planning for how to address disparities and expend our overall plan. Additionally, there will be opportunities for partnership with Vermont's Office of Racial Equity and the newly hired Director of Race, Equity, Gender, and Accessibility within the DCF Commissioner's Office.

Current activities include:

- Policy Update to include process and guidelines for communication to all staff following a critical incident and clarity around process for requesting building security.
- Have worked with all staff to sign up for SOV Alerts so they can have up to date information from BGS as it relates to safety within their building.
- Three Part De-escalation training developed and put out to staff as a mandatory virtual training.
- St. Albans staff were trained in self defense.
- RFP was put out for a self defense program that can be brought to our staff through a train the trainer model. Proposals were reviewed and we are in negotiations with the selected vendor.
- Steps have been taken to increase collaboration with BGS Safety & Security and do building safety assessments in every district.
- New data tracking process.

Vermont has selected the following goals related to our Disaster Plan:

- Have a group of staff trained as trainer in Self-Defense that is grounded in de-escalation. The trainers will then train all staff.
- Renew our contract with Alert Media or go through the process of selecting a new provider for ongoing crisis monitoring for staff in the field.
- Advocacy for increased safety measured based on building safety assessments.
- Increase district safety committees and have select staff trained in basic assessment.