

# Vermont Protection & Advocacy, Inc.

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 12, 2004

Contact: Ed Paquin, Executive Director  
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### **Vermont Protection & Advocacy, Inc. to Release Death Investigation Report of May 2003 Inmate Suicide**

On Tuesday, February 17, 2004 at 12:00pm in Room 11 at the Vermont State House in Montpelier, Vermont Protection & Advocacy, Inc. (VP&A) will hold a press conference to release the outcome of its investigation of the circumstances surrounding the death of Lawrence Bessette Jr. Mr. Bessette committed suicide on May 22, 2003 while incarcerated at the Northern State Correctional Facility in Newport, Vermont.

VP&A is the designated protection and advocacy system for Vermont, charged by federal law to investigate abuse, neglect and rights violations of individuals with mental health and other disabilities. As part of this federal mandate, VP&A has completed its investigation into the circumstances surrounding the suicide death of Mr. Bessette while in the custody of the Vermont Department of Corrections.

The investigation alleges several failures on the part of the Department of Corrections and its contracted employees. VP&A's report recommends several changes and additions to current practices and policies affecting Vermont's disabled inmates in order to try to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Ed Paquin, Executive Director; A.J. Ruben, Supervising Attorney; and Tina Wood, Advocate/Paralegal will be present on behalf of VP&A. In addition, Gregg Meyer, Esq, Kohn & Rath, LLP, will be present representing the family of Mr. Bessette.