

**UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**
2022

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LETTER FROM UNITED AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COALITION

**UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**



To the Honorable Members of the Louisiana Senate and House of Representatives:

This publication was put together by an ever-growing, diverse and bipartisan coalition of individuals and organizations who support victims of domestic abuse. It is not an “easy read”. Some of the content is absolutely horrifying. Our goal is to inform and bring to you, our lawmakers, the realities of domestic abuse in Louisiana. We urge you to study and share this information and to please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

“A Pandemic Within a Pandemic”

This is the terminology used by the New England Journal of Medicine to describe the crisis of intimate partner violence following the implementation of unprecedented Covid-19 “stay at home” orders. Forced confinement of victims with their abusers created tremendous concern for domestic violence service providers who expected significant increased demands for assistance. The opposite occurred and, in some locations, calls dropped by more than 50%.

At the same time, the frequency and severity of domestic abuse episodes skyrocketed - in silence. Victims lacked the freedom to safely connect with law enforcement, to seek medical care and to engage with support groups. Only now, with restrictions lifted, are we learning of the terror inflicted upon domestic abuse victims through forced isolation with abusers. News articles of intimate partner abuse, child abuse, elderly abuse, and even animal abuse, have been flooding the media – the worst being homicides – a record number of unimaginable atrocities committed upon innocent victims who simply could not escape their abusers.

“Louisiana Leads Nation in Domestic Homicides”

Since 2014, the Louisiana Legislature changed hundreds of provisions of law to protect victims of domestic abuse. We were on the way to becoming a model for the nation. Louisiana was second in the nation for domestic homicides when we started this journey, and dropped to fifth in a 2021 report based on 2019 FBI statistics. This is hardly something to celebrate, but it indicated that Louisiana’s tough laws might indeed be working.

The domestic homicide rate for the Covid-19 years is staggering. According to the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Louisiana’s per capita rate of women murdered by men remains 85% higher than the national average. In 2021, 62 people were killed as a result of domestic violence. This includes current and former intimate partners, children, new partners of victims and bystanders. In East Baton Rouge Parish alone, domestic homicides jumped from a record high of 19 in 2020 to 35 in 2021, with District Attorney Hillar Moore stressing that “the brutality of violence committed against women has been much higher than in recent years.” This is unacceptable.

“The 2021 Legislative Auditor’s Report”

The Legislative Auditor’s Performance Report, issued on December 16, 2021, shows that Louisiana is failing when it comes to keeping victims of domestic violence safe:

Overall, we found that Louisiana faces multiple challenges in its efforts to address domestic violence. These challenges include gaps in services for victims, insufficient and inflexible funding, strategies to protect victims not being consistently implemented, lack of oversight for intervention programs for perpetrators, and lack of training for certain entities involved in addressing domestic violence. Specifically, we found the following:

- **Lack of domestic violence shelter beds and support services to meet the needs of all victims is an ongoing challenge in Louisiana.** More funding, consistent funding levels, and more flexibility in how funds can be spent could help improve service delivery to victims. For example, there is no domestic violence shelter in central Louisiana, and shelters across Louisiana had an average of 2,659 unmet requests for shelter per year during federal fiscal years 2015 through 2020. In addition, unlike other states, only 10% of domestic violence funding comes from state sources.
- **State laws intended to protect victims, such as the issuance of protective orders, are not consistently implemented across the state.** For example, protective orders may not always be served to abusers for a variety of reasons, and according to the Supreme Court and sheriffs, not all sheriff's offices submitted proof of service to the Louisiana Protective Order Registry (LPOR), as required by state law. In addition, not all sheriff's offices have developed policies and procedures for the firearm relinquishment process as required by law.
- **While state law requires law enforcement training on domestic violence, other entities involved in addressing domestic violence are not required to have such training. For example, there is no requirement for judges and district attorneys to receive domestic violence training.** In addition, LCLE has not completed a domestic violence awareness training program required by state law for law enforcement officers. Because domestic violence is a complicated, dynamic issue, education on current best practices could improve how the judicial branch and law enforcement protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Intervention programs for perpetrators, which aim to protect victims and prevent future abuse, have no oversight or consistency across the state.** Unlike domestic violence shelters, which must follow standards and be inspected by DCFS, Louisiana has no entity responsible for oversight and monitoring of intervention programs for perpetrators of domestic violence and does not mandate that these programs follow standards that would help ensure consistency and accountability.
- **Awareness efforts in public schools could be strengthened to better identify and prevent domestic violence incidents.** Although state law requires that public schools provide education on dating violence for students and employees, not all Louisiana public schools meet these requirements. As a result, all students may not receive dating violence education or learn how to report instances of dating violence.

"Louisiana Spends Less Money Than Any Other State in the Nation on Domestic Violence Prevention Services"

The phones are ringing now with callers hoping to safely escape abusers with their lives and the lives of their loved ones. In 2021, advocates answered 5,226 calls to the statewide domestic violence hotline. This is over 14 calls a day. Domestic violence programs served 14,406 victims of domestic violence in 2020, including adult victims and their children. Services included shelter, legal advocacy, safety planning, housing assistance, support groups, counseling and much more.

No “general fund” money is allocated to services for domestic violence victims. Louisiana victims should not have to rely on (90%) restricted-use federal grants and minimal (10%) state funding from decreases in prison populations (Justice Reinvestment Project) and inconsistent court fees. The lack of domestic violence shelter beds leads to over 2,600 unmet requests for safe shelter every year. A \$3 million investment of state general funds will allow the Family Violence Prevention Program at the Department of Children and Family Services to increase its capacity for an additional 3,000 survivors annually, but would provide only basic shelter beds with minimal on-site staffing for victims who are currently being turned away. Ideally, an allocation of \$7 million from state general funds would provide additional shelter, counseling, legal services, financial assistance and all of the other safety net programs needed by domestic abuse victims evenly throughout the state. We are not filling potholes here; we are saving lives. We cannot afford to continue to turn away as many domestic violence victims as those who are currently being served each year. Louisiana needs to make consistent state funding a priority – not just this year, every year.

“Protection or Possession?”

In 2014, the Legislature unanimously passed a law to trigger firearm dispossession for the duration of a protective order. Firearm dispossession is not required when a temporary restraining order (TRO) is issued ex parte - although it should because the most dangerous time for a victim is when an abuser finds out that a victim is taking steps to separate from the abuser. Abusers must transfer their firearms for safe-keeping, pursuant to a 2018 law, only for a protective order which is issued after a contradictory hearing in civil proceedings, in criminal “Gwen’s Law” hearings and as a condition of bail after a judge considers the previous criminal history of the defendant and whether the defendant poses a threat or danger to the victim.

These orders are placed in the Louisiana Protective Order Registry. Not only do these orders protect the lives of victims, but they also protect the lives of law enforcement officers who access the registry before responding to domestic disturbances. Despite the increase in domestic homicides and brutal batteries of victims and their children, special interest groups want to make it more difficult for a victim to obtain a protective order by raising the burden of proof from a preponderance of the evidence to a clear and convincing standard.

If this is allowed to happen, Louisiana would become the only state to make it more onerous for a victim to prove heinous acts which almost always occur in isolation. As discussed below, some injuries caused by domestic violence will not manifest themselves for weeks, months or even years. Louisiana should not take our state backwards and make it harder for a victim to prove they have suffered domestic abuse and fear for their lives or the lives of their children, simply so fewer protective orders will be issued and more abusers can keep their firearms. This is insanity.

“Coercive Control is a Gateway to Domestic Violence”

These same groups do not want to include acts of “coercive control” in the definition of domestic abuse because a protective order based on non-physical abuse should not, in their opinion, deprive an abuser of possession of a firearm. Coercive control is the silent partner of domestic violence. It instills fear and helplessness in victims through stalking, harassment, gaslighting, intimidation and threats. The goal of coercive control is to make the victim subordinate or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, regulating their lives, exploiting their resources and capacities, and depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape.

For four years, the Louisiana State Law Institute worked with advocates and other stakeholders in public meetings on a bill to include coercive control in the definition of domestic abuse only when intended by the abuser to prevent the victim from reporting to law enforcement, requesting medical

assistance or emergency victim services or depriving the victim of the means to resist the abuse or escape the relationship. The bill did not pass, but it is coming back in 2023. Coercive control is a gateway to physical violence. Do we really want victims to be protected only when they have black eyes and broken bones? Violence and coercive control escalate at the time of separation from an abuser. What is more important – protection of a victim or possession of a firearm by the abuser?

“Alive, but Impaired for Life – Concussions, Strangulation & PTSD”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one in five women in the United States experience severe intimate-partner violence over the course of their lifetimes, resulting in physical injuries, most commonly to the head, neck and face. **Concussions** are likely to appear with alarming regularity. Every year, hundreds of concussions occur in the NFL; thousands occur in the military. Annual brain injuries among survivors of domestic abuse: 1.6 million. But unlike injuries in sports, war or accidents, domestic assaults happen almost entirely out of view. Victims themselves may not be able to process or remember what happened, and their assaults are often not reported to the police. Researchers concluded that, when women’s heads are being pummeled with baseball bats and work boots, there’s no way they are not sustaining traumatic brain injuries.

Strangulation is not a stand-alone crime in Louisiana, but strangulation during Domestic Abuse Battery or Battery of a Dating Partner enhances sentencing - automatically elevating the charges to felonies. Batterers who strangle their victim are more likely to engage in other extreme acts of violence; it’s a message that there are no limits to which the abuser won’t go. The odds are, the abuser is willing to kill. When we think strangulation, we think bruises around the neck, or fingerprints, scratches, etc., but sometimes the signs of strangulation are less obvious. More than half of the time, signs of strangulation aren’t visible. Some of those symptoms include hoarseness and/or a sore throat, not being able to swallow or experiencing discomfort doing so, and shortness of breath. The victims may potentially have lapses in their memory as well. Incontinence (losing control of the bowels or bladder), loss of hearing, and mood changes are also less obvious signs of strangulation.

PTSD can develop in anyone experiencing a major life-threatening event, and this includes domestic violence, which exposes the victim to varying degrees of fear, vulnerability and helplessness. The fear experienced from a traumatic event can become overwhelming but is often not dealt with immediately, due to the abuser living in close quarters or being in the victim’s life regularly. Other risk factors that increase the likelihood of a domestic violence victim developing PTSD include sustaining a physical injury, feeling helpless, lack of a supportive community, having to deal with additional stressors before and after the event, and having a history of mental illness or addiction. Left untreated, PTSD can cause long-term mental health effects, including anger management issues, severe depression and intense loneliness. Additionally, untreated PTSD can increase the likelihood of developing several life-threatening conditions including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and substance abuse disorders.

“I Felt Like I Was Slowly Dying - No One Could Figure Out Why”*

The quote above is from a survivor of years of domestic abuse. As with other information contained in this cover letter, some sources are not identified. The articles which follow contain this information and so much more. Each year, since 2014, domestic violence prevention advocates have been told by supporters and detractors alike that we should not take legislative actions on these issues personally – it is just politics. But is it really? How does anyone tell victims or their children and other relatives of deceased or impaired victims that it is not personal? Do we want victims and their loved ones to feel that we are collectively refusing to pay for their safety or that we have no interest in enforcing laws passed by the Legislature to protect them?

These problems need to be solved. And we know that you will speak and act with empathy, compassion and integrity because you are Louisianians. Louisianians lead with their hearts. We can do so much better than this.

Most Sincerely,



Kim Sport
Chair
United Against Domestic Violence Commission



Charmaine Caccioppi
Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer
United Way of Southeast Louisiana

*Some of the comments in the last section are paraphrased with permission from compelling remarks made by Lester W. Johnson, M.D. in testimony to the House Ways & Means Committee in 2005.

BILL HIGHLIGHTS

**UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**



2022 Regular Legislative Session

BILL HIGHLIGHTS

HB 7 – Edmonston – Amends the court-monitored domestic abuse intervention program to include online instruction, no longer directs the program's sessions to follow a specific model, and prohibits the use of any technology prohibited by HIPAA. (Support online instruction only during public health declaration)

HB 64 – Landry – Provides relative to the age of a child as a protected person. (STAR bill - Support)

HB 68 – Carpenter – Adds murder of a minor child of the offender with specific intent to kill or inflict great bodily harm to the crime of first degree murder. (Support)

HB 124 – Muscarello – Authorizes hearings on any motion or exception and judge trials to be conducted by any audio-visual means. If witness testimony is necessary, a party may request that the hearing be conducted in person. (Support)

HB 223 – Marcelle – Excludes defendants convicted of domestic violence from participation in the workforce development sentencing program. (Support)

HB 272 – Jefferson – Requires the mental health professionals providing evaluations in divorce and custody proceedings to be licensed and defines "licensed mental health professional". (Support)

HB 313 – Pressley – Removes time limitation to apply for Crime Victims Reparations Fund and makes survivors or victims' loved ones of all felonies eligible to receive funds. (LCADV & STAR Bill - Support)

HB 402 – Hughes – Provides prescriptive period for certain actions for abuse of a minor. (STAR Bill – Support)

HB 409 – Marino – Specifies that a peace officer may not issue written summons instead of making custodial arrests for domestic abuse battery, a violation of a protective order, stalking, or any other offense involving the use or threatened use of force or a deadly weapon upon the defendant's family member, household member, or dating partner. (Support arrest of predominant aggressor)

HB 431 – Jordan – Prohibits the use of DNA obtained from a victim’s sexual assault collection kit in an investigation against the victim who submitted the DNA if the victim is charged with or suspected of committing any criminal offense. (STAR Bill – Support)

HB 462 – Mincey – Creates the crime of unauthorized removal of a minor from a school. (Support)

HB 464 – Seabaugh – Requires “clear and convincing” standard of evidence for permanent injunctions or protective orders that affect firearm transfers. (Oppose)

HB 483 – Johnson – Provides relative to the restoration of gun rights and reduces prohibitions for concealed weapon permits and firearm possession for certain felony convictions from 10 years to 5 years. (Oppose)

HB 492 – Fontenot – Provides that a peace officer shall not issue a written summons when the officer has reasonable grounds to believe a person committed certain domestic violence crimes. (Support)

HB 508 – Miller – Provides that when an inmate who has been convicted of a crime of violence or a sex offense is eligible for release, the Board of Pardons or the committee on parole shall notify the victim or the victim’s family, all persons who have filed a victim registration and notification form, the appropriate law enforcement agency, and the appropriate district attorney no later than 30 days prior to the inmate’s release. (Support)

HB 520 – Hughes – Provides relative to emergency contraception for victims of sexual assault. (STAR Bill - Support)

HB 560 – Freeman – Amends the Domestic Abuse Assistance Act in the Children’s Code to make it consistent with the Domestic Abuse Assistance Act in Title 46. (Support)

HB 561 – Freeman – Provides relative to civil liability for sexual assault. (STAR Bill - Support)

HB 585 – Freeman – Provides for the mandatory reporting of aggregate firearm transfer data by the sheriff of each parish to the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement. (LCADV Bill -Support)

HB 615 – Freeman – Provides relative to law enforcement records to be released to a victim. (STAR Bill – Support)

HB 638 – Freeman – Provides relative to the expungement of certain records for victims of human trafficking. (STAR Bill – Support in concept)

HB 648 – Hilferty – Makes improvements to Crime Victim Reparations, including allowing partial awards when one part of the award is denied, adding costs of relocation due to the death of the victim, replacing the reporting requirement with a reasonable documentation requirement, and other changes. (Support)

- SB 51 – Mizell** – Adds a 2nd Commissioner to the 22nd JDC and authorizes commissioners to preside over domestic violence cases and civil matters. (Support)
- SB 66 – Connick** – Provides enhanced penalties for violation of a protection order when the offender goes to the household, school, or place of employment of the protected person while in possession of a firearm. (Support)
- SB 69 – Connick** – Makes improvements to crime victims reparations. Eases restrictions on eligibility and involvement in criminal justice processes. Removes requirement that a victim must report a crime within 72 hours and expands eligibility to victims of additional crimes. Removes requirement that the victim or designated family member must register with LCLE in order to receive services. (Support)
- SB 142 – Morris** – Prohibits a court from waiving minimum mandatory sentences for all crimes of violence as defined in R.S. 14:2(B). (Support)
- SB 148 – Mizell** – Provides for post-conviction relief for victims of human trafficking. (Support in concept)
- SB 174 – Mizell** – Provides for sexual assault survivors to have access to certain documents from forensic medical examinations. (Support in concept)
- SB 251 – Barrow** – Amends the Code of Evidence to allow for expert witness testimony in the form of an opinion on whether the defendant is a victim of intimate partner violence, domestic violence, or sexual violence and committed the offense as a direct result of being a victim. (LCADV Bill - Support)
- SB 255 – Barrow** – Clarifies when a victim cannot be cast with court costs in protection order proceedings by defining a "frivolous claim". Provides that failure to appear at a hearing on the petition for a protective order cannot in and of itself constitute grounds for assessing court costs and fees against the petitioner. (LCADV & STAR Bill - Support)
- SB 289 – Barrow** – Requires employers to provide paid and unpaid sick leave for employees and covers leave for domestic violence injuries. (Support)
- SB 327 – Carter** – Provides for the seizure of firearms from persons who pose a risk of imminent injury to self or others. (Support)
- SB 365 – Barrow** – Creates the Louisiana Domestic Violence Registry. (Oppose)

GAPS IN RESOURCES

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS

A VITAL SAFETY NET

THE PROBLEM

DANGEROUS GAPS IN RESOURCES

- The Louisiana Legislative Auditor found that “gaps in victim services available, such as emergency shelter beds, transportation, housing, and legal advocacy, make it difficult for domestic violence service providers to meet the needs of all victims.”^[1]
- Louisiana’s domestic violence homicide rate is consistently among the highest in the nation.^[2]
- In 2021, **62** people were killed as a result of domestic violence in Louisiana.
- Louisiana does not currently allocate state general funds to domestic violence services. This results in dangerous gaps in safety across the state.
- The lack of domestic violence shelter beds leads to over **2,600** unmet requests for shelter every year, placing domestic violence victims at risk.

THE SOLUTION

AN INVESTMENT IN SAFETY

A **\$3 million** appropriation of state general funds to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Family Violence Prevention Program is needed to fill immediate gaps in services. This would fund annual operating expenses for approximately **200 additional shelter beds**, which could shelter an additional 3,000 survivors annually.

The Family Violence Prevention program at DCFS contracts with nonprofits to provide domestic violence shelter services according to best practices and strict standards to ensure victim safety. The program is currently funded with only federal funds. A \$3 million investment of state general funds will allow the program to increase its capacity, ensuring shelter is available when a victim needs it.



1 - Louisiana Legislative Auditor, Performance Audit Services, *Challenges in Louisiana’s Efforts to Address Domestic Violence*, December 2021.

2 - Violence Policy Center, *When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2019 Homicide Data*, September 2021.



Louisiana Doesn't Allocate Enough Money to Domestic Violence Services, Audit Finds

Louisiana isn't able to provide services to all the domestic violence victims that seek them and five state laws meant to combat domestic violence aren't consistently enforced, according to [a report from the Louisiana Legislative Auditor](#) released this week.

The state turned down an average of 2,659 requests for shelter from domestic violence victims annually from 2015 through 2020. There are only 386 domestic violence shelter beds across 16 facilities in the state. In 2020, those shelters took in 2,212 individuals.

Central Louisiana has no domestic violence shelter at all, according to [the audit](#), though its largest parish, Rapides, issued 849 protective orders last year. That was the 10th highest number of protective orders issued in any Louisiana parish in 2020. Louisiana also lost a shelter in 2017, when a facility in New Iberia closed.

The state struggles overall with domestic violence. In 2017, Louisiana had the second-highest rate of female homicide in the country behind Alaska. In 2018, it had the fifth-highest rate. The bulk of women murdered in both years – around 60 percent – were killed by intimate partners, according to the audit. Yet Louisiana spends less money than many other states on preventing domestic violence. Most of the public funding spent on domestic violence in Louisiana – 90 percent of the money – comes from the federal government. Just 10 percent comes from the state.

In total, the federal and state spending on domestic violence came to \$15.3 million during the last budget cycle. The state has not made moves toward increasing funding for domestic violence services, despite experiencing large surpluses over the last few years.

When the state was flush with cash this year, the Louisiana Legislature allocated \$15 million for Louisiana Capitol technology upgrades and [\\$4.5 million to movie theater owners](#) for COVID-19 economic recovery efforts. Lawmakers also spent [\\$85 million on their own pet projects](#) – giving money to recreation centers, sports complexes, local YMCAs, social clubs and American Legion halls – that aren't typically funded by the state.

No state "general fund" money – the most flexible type of state funding – goes toward services for domestic violence victims currently, according to the audit. The state funding available comes from the justice reinvestment initiative – money saved when Louisiana decreases its prison population – and legal fees attached to marriage licenses, divorces and parental rights.

Meanwhile, domestic violence service providers told the auditor they struggle to keep their staff because they can't pay them a competitive wage. Two federal grants used to provide services – totaling \$6 million annually – didn't increase from 2011 to 2020.

The federal funding also isn't flexible, which makes it difficult to use. For example, two of the larger federal grants cannot be used to build new shelter facilities. There are strict limits on how much can be spent on administrative costs, which makes it difficult to fund executive director positions at Louisiana shelters.

Other states put more state revenue toward domestic violence programming. Georgia puts state funds toward the salaries for shelter's executive directors as well as a mortgage assistance program that helps with victims' housing needs, according to the audit.

Outside of boosting financial support, the auditor recommended the state expand mandated training on domestic violence to prosecutors and judges. Currently, only law enforcement officers are required to go through classes on domestic violence.

The Louisiana District Attorneys Association said, in a letter to the auditor, that legally required domestic violence training is not necessary for prosecutors, since many already go through similar training offered through the association.

The auditor also suggested more regulation and oversight of the domestic violence intervention programs, which judges often require perpetrators of domestic violence to take. The state has no minimum standards for such programs currently, and in 2012, the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence found that nearly half of the state's programs were using treatment methods considered inappropriate by domestic violence experts. But Louisiana might be struggling with domestic violence because officials aren't complying with state domestic laws that have already been passed.

Here's a look at the domestic violence laws the auditor found aren't enforced statewide:

Sheriffs must provide proof that a protective order was served (2018)

Lawmakers passed [a law](#) in 2018 that required sheriffs' offices to provide "proof of service" to the Supreme Court that a protective order has been served to an alleged perpetrator of violence.

In other words, someone from the sheriff's office is now legally required to provide evidence that an alleged domestic violence abuser has been told by a sheriff's officer that he or she cannot have contact with an alleged victim. The sheriff's office has to enter this information into the Louisiana Protective Order Registry run by the Louisiana Supreme Court.

Advocates and victims said the law is necessary because law enforcement has been unable to enforce protective orders when it could not provide evidence that the alleged abuser had been notified of the order. The Legislature passed the law, sponsored by Rep. Larry Bagley, R-Stonewall, unanimously.

But the Louisiana Supreme Court said some sheriffs' offices still aren't submitting "proof of service" for protective orders to the statewide database. The court has sent sheriffs who aren't complying reminders that they need to do so, according to the auditor.

The Louisiana Sheriffs Association is also addressing the "paperwork" issue. In some cases, sheriffs have been returning that documentation to the clerk of court and not submitting them to the Louisiana Protective Order Registry, wrote Mike Ranatza, executive director of the Louisiana Sheriffs Association, in a letter to the auditor. He said the association has scheduled additional training with the Supreme Court to assist with the problem.

Court clerks need to inform law enforcement of protective orders within two days (2014)

In 2014, legislators made [a number of changes to state law](#) aimed at speeding up the notification of protective orders to both the Supreme Court and law enforcement, which is responsible for informing the alleged perpetrator about the order.

[The law](#), sponsored by former state lawmaker and current New Orleans City Council President Helena Moreno, requires local clerks of court to send copies of any protective orders to the chief law enforcement officer of the parish where the alleged victim resides.

Under that law, the copy of the protective order must be sent by fax or electronic means, rather than mail, to speed up the notification process. It needs to arrive no later than the end of the business day after the protective order has been filed with the court clerk.

These changes were supposed to ensure that people who are the subject of the order – such as domestic abusers – are notified of their new restrictions in a timely manner. But the auditor talked to one sheriff's office who said it still struggles to serve temporary restraining orders because it often only gets the paperwork after the restraining order – which can last up to 21 days – has expired.

People convicted of domestic violence or under a protective order can't have firearms (2018)

Legislators approved [a law in 2018](#) that requires people who are prohibited from having firearms due to a domestic violence conviction or a protective order to turn their weapons into the local sheriff within 48 hours. Former state senator and incoming New Orleans City Councilman J.P. Morrell, a Democrat, sponsored the legislation.

Under the law, sheriffs oversee three different processes for transferring these weapons. The weapons can go to a third party for holding. The sheriff can put the firearms in a storage facility owned by the sheriff or the sheriff can also arrange for the sale of the firearm.

The auditor found that several sheriffs don't have policies and procedures in place for handling the firearms transfers, even though state law required the sheriffs to do so by the beginning of 2019.

The Louisiana Sheriffs Association said it believes sheriffs are safely overseeing firearms transfers across the state, but it has sent a note to sheriffs' offices to urge them to have written policy in place for such transfers in order to be in compliance with the law.

A state commission needs to develop domestic violence training for officers (2018)

The Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement never created a new domestic violence awareness training program for law enforcement officers that it was required to develop [under a 2018 state law](#).

The commission created some domestic violence materials for law enforcement classes, but those materials don't meet all the requirements laid out by the 2018 law, sponsored by state Rep. Patricia Smith, D-Baton Rouge.

For example, the current materials don't address why strangulation might be important in a domestic violence dispute or communication with domestic violence victims, which is legally required, according to the auditor.

The commission told the auditor that the training had not been developed because the Louisiana Legislature never gave them funding to do so. It's not clear why existing funding couldn't be used for this purpose.

The auditor said that the commission received over \$90,000 in federal grants specifically for domestic

violence training from 2016 to 2019. The new training development was expected to cost \$28,000.

The Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement told the auditor in a letter that it is now using “other sources for funding” to complete the new training program.

Schools need to offer instruction on dating violence in middle and high school (2010)

The auditor found that not all public schools were educating students in grades 7 to 12 about dating violence, as they are required to do [under 2010 and 2014 state laws](#).

The law also requires employees who are around middle and high school students to go through training on dating violence, which not all school systems are doing.

School systems told the auditor they cannot offer the programming because they were never given funding to do so. Some school leaders contacted by the auditor also weren't aware they were legally required to offer dating violence programming, and have now made plans to do so.



<https://www.wafb.com/2021/12/21/investigators-audit-shows-state-failing-key-areas-prevent-domestic-violence/>

By Scottie Hunter
December 20, 2021
BATON ROUGE, LA

THE INVESTIGATORS: Audit Shows State Failing in Key Areas to Prevent Domestic Violence

BATON ROUGE, La. (WAFB) - As 2021 comes to a close, an audit shows Louisiana is failing in a couple of key areas when it comes to keeping victims of domestic violence safe.

Auditors found, among other things, there is a shortage of shelter beds available to victims, protective orders issued across the state are not consistent and intervention programs lack real oversight.

"I think it's a really good effort on the auditor's part to look at the entire state and to look at overall how services are being provided to either domestic violence victims or domestic violence offenders," said EBR District Attorney Hillar Moore.

Moore participated in the audit and calls the findings eye-opening.

"We probably need to spend more money and more time and more services to victims of crime, particularly domestic violence. We're just not funding this enough," he added.

In East Baton Rouge Parish alone, the numbers have skyrocketed. Last year, the number of deaths related to domestic violence broke records at 19. In 2021, that number was shattered with 35 deaths related to domestic violence. While the parish grapples with the biggest year ever for murders, about 26 percent of those murders are tied to domestic violence.

"That's a big number," said Moore.

Another number that's big is the protective orders issued to keep victims safe. While the audit points out most of those orders being put in place are inconsistent, Moore said that's not the case in EBR. The parish, at one point, issued 300 protective orders a year, and now, it issues about 300 every quarter.

"So, our judges are issuing protective orders in those cases where it's most appropriate," explained Moore.

Auditors also found training is not the same across the board. While members of law enforcement are required by state law to be trained in domestic violence, district attorneys and judges don't have to meet that same standard.

Moore asked if that training is something that has happened here in East Baton Rouge.

"Yes," he answered. "We train often on domestic violence and I know that the District Attorneys' Association does a good job of holding seminars and training throughout the year, so we do a lot of training on our own though not mandated."

For the most part, Moore said EBR is better off than most other pockets of the state but he added there's still room for improvement everywhere. He believes this audit is an important tool in highlighting the work that needs to be done. "This surely is the right step," Moore added.

The DA is hoping the findings in the audit will help lawmakers work out a plan to address those issues sooner rather than later. He believes that will not only keep victims safe but also get those offenders the help they need as well.

[CLICK HERE](#) to view the audit.



<https://wgno.com/news/state-audit-highlights-major-gaps-in-domestic-violence-services/>

By Raychelle Riley
December 21, 2021
BATON ROUGE, LA

State Audit Highlights Major Gaps in Domestic Violence Services

BATON ROUGE, La. (BRPROUD) — From funding to restraining orders, Louisiana faces several hurdles in addressing domestic violence, according to a state auditor's report.

"The COVID-19 pandemic didn't create domestic violence out of nowhere, it didn't suddenly make it worse, but it has really exacerbated existing circumstances," said Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence Director Mariah Wineski.

The [state's auditor's office notices an unsettling trend](#) — Louisiana has one of the highest female homicide rates in the country.

"This is not an easy fix. There's so many entities that are involved throughout the process from when the abuse actually happens, through the investigations to the programs through the judicial system," said Louisiana Legislative Audit Performance Audit Services Manager Emily Dixon.

[Twin sister of murder-suicide victim promises to advocate for domestic violence awareness](#)

The state's research found many shortcomings when it comes to addressing domestic violence. "For example, in central Louisiana and Rapides Parish there's not actually a shelter there, there are shelter services that provide, you know, some other types of victim services, but not an actual shelter with beds," Louisiana Legislative Audit Senior Performance Auditor Kristen Jacobs explained.

"The schools aren't doing the training as required. I think with any kind of violence, to stop this and minimize it, it's going to start with the kids in the schools," added Dixon.

Auditors also found that intervention programs for perpetrators aren't monitored and some protective orders aren't being followed out.

"We're not necessarily surprised by the findings, a lot of these have been issues that we've been dealing with on the ground for a long time," said Wineski.

[East Baton Rouge surpasses 2020 domestic violence-related deaths](#)

[According to the state audit](#), only 10 percent of money given to domestic violence services comes from the state. The other 90 percent from the federal government is sometimes unpredictable and inflexible. "Louisiana's domestic violence providers have to turn away over 2,500 requests for shelter every year. And in a state like Louisiana, that's a really scary number," said Wineski. "It's important to us and has been important to us that the victim service providers throughout the state have adequate funding and adequate resources to be able to do the lifesaving work that they are required to do."

"We're hoping that with the session starting in the next three months that it'll get some attention," Dixon said.

State lawmakers will gather at the Capitol in March.

PANDEMIC WITHIN A PANDEMIC

**UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**



<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2024046>

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Perspective

A Pandemic Within a Pandemic – Intimate Partner Violence During Covid-19

As Covid-19 cases surged in the United States in March 2020, stay-at-home orders were put in place. Schools closed, and many workers were furloughed, laid off, or told to work from home. With personal movement limited and people confined to their homes, advocates expressed concern about a potential increase in intimate partner violence (IPV). Stay-at-home orders, intended to protect the public and prevent widespread infection, left many IPV victims trapped with their abusers. Domestic-violence hotlines prepared for an increase in demand for services as states enforced these mandates, but many organizations experienced the opposite. In some regions, the number of calls dropped by more than 50%.¹ Experts in the field knew that rates of IPV had not decreased, but rather that victims were unable to safely connect with services. Though restrictions on movement have been lifted in most regions, the pandemic and its effects rage on, and there is widespread agreement that areas that have seen a drop in caseloads are likely to experience a second surge. This pandemic has reinforced important truths: inequities related to social determinants of health are magnified during a crisis, and sheltering in place does not inflict equivalent hardship on all people.

One in 4 women and one in 10 men experience IPV, and violence can take various forms: it can be physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological.² People of all races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, socioeconomic classes, and religions experience IPV. However, such violence has a disproportionate effect on communities of color and other marginalized groups. Economic instability, unsafe housing, neighborhood violence, and lack of safe and stable child care and social support can worsen already tenuous situations. IPV cannot be addressed without also addressing social factors, especially in the context of a pandemic that is causing substantial isolation.

Economic independence is a critical factor in violence prevention. For many people who experience IPV, the financial entanglement with an abusive partner is too convoluted to sever without an alternative source of economic support. The pandemic has exacerbated financial entanglement by causing increased job loss and unemployment, particularly among women of color, immigrants, and workers without a college education.³ The public health restrictions put in place to combat the spread of the virus have also reduced access to alternative sources of housing: shelters and hotels have reduced their capacity or shut down, and travel restrictions have limited people's access to safe havens. Shelters have made valiant efforts to ease crowding and to help residents move into hotels, extended-stay apartments, or the homes of family members and friends. Though some restrictions have been lifted, many shelters remain closed or are operating at reduced capacity, which creates challenges for people who need alternative housing arrangements.

Closures of schools and child care facilities have added to the stress at home. Virtual learning often requires the involvement and supervision of parents and guardians. Some families don't have access to a reliable Internet connection, and child care obligations may fall to friends, neighbors, or family members while parents work or attempt to find work. Some parents are considered essential workers and cannot work from home, and others are required to work virtually. The added stress of balancing work, child care, and children's education has led to a rise in child abuse.⁴ Mandated reporters, such as

teachers, child care providers, and clinicians, also have fewer interactions with children and families and fewer opportunities to assess, recognize, and report signs of abuse than they did before the pandemic. There may also be barriers to reporting IPV during the pandemic. The way in which police reports can be filed varies among precincts, with some offering online options and others requiring in-person visits. Similarly, individual trial courts have discretion to determine filing procedures for restraining orders. The lack of a coherent and consistent process for reporting abuse can be discouraging for people seeking help through the legal system. Black and Brown people, who have long faced oppression and brutality by police, may also be less likely than White people to involve the police when IPV escalates.

Most people who experience IPV don't seek help. Medical professionals have an opportunity to identify these patients in health care settings and to provide counseling and connect people with social services. Medical offices can be safe places for patients to disclose abuse. Physical examination findings; a patient's behavior during or while discussing physically intimate components of a breast, pelvic, or rectal examination; or an aggressive partner can be warnings signs of possible IPV. In settings such as emergency departments and labor and delivery suites, policies mandate screening for IPV when patients are alone. Evaluation in a clinic or hospital setting permits immediate intervention, including involvement of social workers, safety planning, and a review of services available to victims and their dependents. Even this opportunity has often been absent in the Covid-19 era. As offices canceled and rescheduled nonurgent clinic visits and moved to telemedicine platforms, safely screening patients for IPV became more difficult. Not only might patients live in areas with unreliable Internet or cellular service, but abusers might be listening in on conversations, leaving patients unable to disclose escalating abuse at home.

Certain steps could promote more equitable access to services as a second wave of Covid-19 infections looms. First, communities could ensure equal access to broadband Internet service in people's homes. Access could be expanded by means of a subsidy program mirroring the Federal Communications Commission Lifeline program or the installation of wireless access points in public spaces.⁵ Such approaches would not only enable wider access to telehealth, but would also permit people who have experienced IPV to search for resources and maintain their critical social connections.

Providers can continue to screen for IPV and discuss safety planning with their patients during telemedicine appointments. Clinicians can normalize screening using standardized questions and can offer information to all patients, regardless of whether they disclose IPV. Available resources are shown in the [box](#). Clinicians can also educate themselves about available community resources. If abuse is disclosed, the clinician and patient can establish signals to identify the presence of an abusive partner during telemedicine appointments. Such signals could include a raised fist on a video call or set phrases during an audio call. When it is safe to have a discussion about IPV, clinicians can review safety practices, such as deleting Internet browsing history or text messages; saving hotline information under other listings, such as a grocery store or pharmacy listing; and creating a new, confidential email account for receiving information about resources or communicating with clinicians.

IPV RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS.

- **Crisis Text Line** (text HOME to 741741)
- **National Parent Hotline** (call 1-855-427-2736)
- **Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline** (visit <https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline/>. opens in new tab or call 1-800-422-4453)
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline** (visit <http://thehotline.org>. opens in new tab, text LOVEIS to 22522, or call 1-800-799-7233)
- **Futures Without Violence** (visit <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/resources-events/get-help/>. opens in new tab)

Finally, governing bodies should consider social determinants of health when developing crisis standards of care. Privilege, finances, and access to resources all affect the impact of IPV on patients.

The Covid-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on numerous ongoing public health crises, including violence within the home. As state mandates relax and people begin to live a new version of normal, clinicians, public health officials, and policymakers cannot stop addressing the layers of social inequities in our communities and the ways in which they affect people's access to care. The pandemic has highlighted how much work needs to be done to ensure that people who experience abuse can continue to obtain access to support, refuge, and medical care when another public health disaster hits. [Disclosure forms](#) provided by the authors are available at NEJM.org.

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March 27, 2020

By Jacqueline DeRobertis, Staff Writer
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Staying Home to Stop Coronavirus is 'Anything But Safe' For Victims of Domestic Abuse



Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome speaks at a press conference Friday, March 27, 2020 about the potential rise in domestic violence due to the coronavirus. She was joined by other local officials and community leaders calling for awareness during the crisis.

East Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillare Moore III speaks about domestic violence deaths from the previous year at a press conference Friday, March 27, 2020. He was joined by the mayor-president, law enforcement leaders and community advocates to speak about the potential increase in domestic violence as the coronavirus pandemic keeps victims trapped at home with their abusers.

In the days following the statewide directive to shelter in place as the [coronavirus](#) spreads across Louisiana, local leaders and advocates say victims of domestic violence could face increased danger while they are trapped inside with their abusers.

Friday morning, Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome, along with other local officials and community advocates, shared resources for victims and warned that there is a heightened risk for domestic violence amid the pandemic.

"Individuals who are in physically or emotionally abusive situations may experience an increase in the frequency or intensity of that abuse," Broome said. "Spending days or weeks with an abusive partner or family member opens the door for immense physical and emotional trauma."

The parish saw a spike in domestic and dating violence in 2016 following the catastrophic flooding that swept through the capital region, according to East Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillar Moore III. Moore's office tracked an increase not only in domestic violence incidents around that time, but also in slayings in which domestic abuse was the motive, along with murder-suicides.

His annual domestic violence report for 2019, released Friday, shows there were only two domestic violence homicides last year, but four total victims killed in the attacks. Moore worries that with the COVID-19 outbreak, the rest of 2020 may look a lot like 2017, the year after the flood, where the parish had 14 domestic violence deaths.

"We already appear to see a spike in these types of cases," Moore said. "However, it is too soon to know the actual statistics."

Baton Rouge Police Chief Murphy Paul noted that data from the last two weeks indicate that battery and assaults are up — a cause for concern even as crime overall is down. And East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office Capt. Chiquita Broussard added that although domestic violence calls are lower than usual this time of year, that does not necessarily mean domestic violence incidents have lessened.

"I think that with the situation of domestic violence, if you're in the presence of your abuser, it's hard to call for help," Broussard said. "And just because these numbers are down now doesn't mean we won't see an increase after the crisis."

Domestic violence victims vulnerable as coronavirus causes isolation; help still available

Moore noted the fear and anxiety many people are experiencing with the rapid spread of COVID-19, just as with other disaster scenarios, may lead abusers further isolate and terrorize their victims in order to maintain some semblance of control.

"We're asking people to stay at home because it's safe," Moore said. "The reality is, for many people, home is anything but safe."

Judge Hunter Greene, of East Baton Rouge family court, said for domestic violence, the court is open every day of the week even as other matters are limited in other legal venues across the state. Community leaders underscored the importance of residents reaching out to friends, coworkers or family they believe may be in abusive relationships or situations, imploring them to check in and let them know about resources available.

They added that while the stress of the pandemic may exacerbate abuse already present in relationships, the problem of domestic violence is ongoing.

"Just because we have a crisis in our community, it doesn't mean domestic violence comes to an end," said Twahna Harris, a local advocate. "I want you to know that domestic violence is 365 days a year." Shelters like [Iris Domestic Violence Center](#) remain open to the public, with certain precautions taken to protect guests.

[The Butterfly Society](#), a domestic violence nonprofit, also provides services for victims and has not shut down in light of the coronavirus spread.

[Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response](#), another local advocacy group, has suspended their in-person services but are still able to talk to clients remotely. Their 24-hour crisis hotline also remains open.

For advice on how to develop a safety plan while living with an abuser, victims can review [The National Domestic Violence Hotline website](#).

The [Louisiana Domestic Violence Hotline](#) is also available 24-hours a day.

Domestic Violence Is a Pandemic Within the COVID-19 Pandemic

The last thing Sheila wanted to do on May 21 was drive her car. Getting behind the wheel with a concussion, multiple skull hematomas, and bruises and abrasions across her body was a decidedly bad idea. But it was the only way her husband would have let her out of the house.

She told him she was going out to buy him cigarettes. The truth was, Sheila (a pseudonym to protect her identity) was heading to meet her pastor's wife, who worked at one of the offices in the city hall of her small Nebraska town, seeking help to escape the domestic hell in which she'd been living since the start of spring. That was when the first wave of COVID-19 began and the economy collapsed, taking the trucking business her husband had started down with it. That too was when she, her husband and their four children were, like hundreds of millions of other people, forced into the high-stress, close quarters life of pandemic lockdowns.

And that too, she says, is when the beatings began. No sooner did the lockdown start than he began using methamphetamine, according to Sheila, soon developing a consuming delusion that she was cheating on him and hiding a secret computer tablet somewhere in the house on which he would find evidence of her infidelity. He first confronted her in March, just as the quarantining began—and first struck her then too.

"He smacked me hard, I hit the floor, and then he dumped his drink in my face," she says.

Her escape on May 21 put an end to the abuse. With the help of her pastor and his wife, she connected with [Bright Horizons](#), a shelter and advocacy group for people who have experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence, and separated from her husband, with divorce proceedings now underway. Additionally, law enforcement intervened, and her husband is now facing possible jail time for his behavior.

Growing evidence shows the pandemic has made intimate partner violence more common—and often more severe. "COVID doesn't make an abuser," says Jacky Mulveen, project manager of Women's Empowerment and Recovery Educators (WE:ARE), an advocacy and support group in Birmingham, England. "But COVID exacerbates it. It gives them more tools, more chances to control you. The abuser says, 'You can't go out; you're not going anywhere,' and the government also is saying, 'You have to stay in.'"

That was Sheila's experience. "The abuse was going to happen anyway," she says. "Having the excuse of there's nowhere to go, there's nothing to do, didn't help."

Surveys around the world have shown domestic abuse spiking since January of 2020—jumping markedly year over year compared to the same period in 2019. According to the [American Journal of Emergency Medicine](#) and the United Nations group [U.N. Women](#), when the pandemic began, incidents of domestic violence increased 300% in Hubei, China; 25% in Argentina, 30% in Cyprus, 33% in Singapore and 50% in Brazil. The U.K., where [calls to domestic violence hotlines](#) have soared since the pandemic hit, was particularly shaken in June by [the death of Amy-Leanne Stringfellow](#), 26, a mother of one and a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, allegedly at the hands of her 45-year-old boyfriend.

In the U.S., the situation is equally troubling, with police departments reporting increases in cities around the country: for example, 18% in San Antonio, 22% in Portland, Ore.; and 10% in New York City, according to the [*American Journal of Emergency Medicine*](#). One [*study in the journal Radiology*](#) reports that at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, radiology scans and superficial wounds consistent with domestic abuse from March 11 to May 3 of this year exceeded the totals for the same period in 2018 and 2019 combined.

And as the pandemic has dragged on, so too has the abuse. Just as the disease continues to claim more lives, quarantine-linked domestic violence is claiming more victims—and not just women in heterosexual relationships. Intimate partner violence occurs in same-sex couples at rates [equal to or even higher](#) than the rates in opposite sex partners. What's more, the economic challenges of the pandemic have hit same-sex couples especially hard, with members of the LGBTQ community likelier to be employed in highly affected industries like education, restaurants, hospitals and retail, [according to the Human Rights Campaign Foundation](#). That means higher stress and, concomitantly, the higher risk that that stress will explode into violence.

As with so many things, communities of color are affected more severely as well, with systemic inequities often meaning lower income and less access to social and private services. "While one in three white women report having experienced domestic violence [during the pandemic], [the rates of abuse increased dramatically to about 50%](#) and higher for those marginalized by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship status, and cognitive physical ability," says Erika Sussman, executive director of the Center for Survivor Advocacy and Justice (CSAJ), a support and research organization.

Not everyone can make the clean escape Sheila did, with the usual options for trapped women, like calling hotlines, even less available than usual during the pandemic. "How much harder is it for them to call when their abuser is quarantining with them as well, sitting on the couch next to them or in the other room?" asks Cassie Mecklenberg, executive director of [Sheltering Wings](#), a shelter and support group for abused partners in Danville, Ind. Even if it's possible to call a shelter, in times of pandemic it can be difficult to secure a bed in one, as social distancing has forced such facilities to reduce their capacity to limit the risk of spreading the virus.

With safe harbors cut off, more and more people are left suffering what the [United Nations calls](#) "a shadow pandemic" of domestic abuse within the larger pandemic of the virus itself. Only when the second one lifts, will the full scope of the first one be known.

Alone together

Isolation has always been one of the most powerful weapons in the abuser's arsenal. At first the attention seems benign, even caring, with abusers burrowing themselves deeper and deeper into the victim's daily life. Only later, does the darker purpose become evident.

"At the beginning, a partner's offer of 'I'll take you there. I'll give you a lift. I'll pick you up. I'll come shopping with you,' can seem romantic," says Mulveen, of WE:ARE, who suffered and survived her own abusive relationship in the 1990s. "They'll say, 'Are you going out with your friends? I'll come with you.'" But what at first seems like an effort at partnering can quickly start to feel like an attempt to take control, and before long, the abuser no longer likes the friends, no longer allows the victim to go shopping alone. "Quite quickly," says Mulveen of her own experience, "he's coming in from work, he's really tired and saying, 'I don't want any phone calls or people calling.' Your brain is on constant high alert. If there was music he didn't like and it came on the radio and he wasn't in the house, I'd turn it down just in case."

When there's little to no time apart, such abuse can grow worse, quickly. Even with the difficulty many victims have had phoning hotlines during the pandemic, calls from people experiencing domestic violence in the U.K. jumped 200% in the spring of 2020 compared to call volume before the lockdowns

began, according to [Refuge](#), a U.K.-based domestic violence charity. People who could not safely make a call began finding other ways to reach out—slipping off to the bathroom with their smartphones with them and texting instead, reports Caroline Bradbury-Jones, a professor of gender-based violence and health at the University of Birmingham in the U.K.

Breaking free

Abusers are exceedingly good manipulators, toggling between threats and wheedling—often pleading for forgiveness and promising to do better in the future. Those strategies can be diabolically effective at all times, but during the pandemic, they have particular power since quarantining and related problems like job loss are legitimate challenges; that is, they can be real problems that would cause tension even in the most stable relationships. In an abusive relationship, however, these very legitimate problems become a pretext for very illegitimate behavior. “Sometimes what happens is people might justify the abuse because the perpetrator is just really stressed and wouldn’t otherwise do this,” says Mecklenburg.

This makes it harder to get out and, just as challenging, to *stay* out. Mecklenburg says that on average, survivors return to the relationship seven times before they leave for good. Bradbury-Jones puts the figure at eight, but either way, leaving isn’t easy—especially when the abuser plays the pandemic card as an excuse for the violent behavior.

In the marginalized communities the CSAJ studied, making a break can be more difficult still. The lack of basic service like access to transportation and day care increase the obstacles to making a clean escape. So too can the absence of shelters in some communities and inadequate income to afford the legal services necessary to dissolve an abusive marriage and resolve issues like child support and visitation rights.

Women who have managed to leave abusive relationships in the past year have often, somewhat paradoxically, found quarantining helpful in their recovery. Lockdowns don’t just prevent the victims from going out, after all, they also keep the abuser at home, providing an obstacle that can help prevent former partners from reconnecting. In Bradbury-Jones’ interviews with domestic abuse survivors, she has heard repeatedly that the easing of quarantine restrictions fills them with a very real *unease*. “In that context, a lockdown was like a savior,” she says.

Eventually, as vaccines roll out and case counts at last drop, all of the quarantining will end, and partners who were abused during lockdown may begin to re-emerge into the world, newly free to leave their tormentors behind. “COVID gave my husband an excuse to hold me there,” says Sheila today. If the uptick in calls the shelters have been receiving during lockdowns is any indication, there could be a lot of such flights to freedom to come. None of them will be easy. Many of them will be scary. No less than the battle against the COVID pandemic, the battle against the abuse pandemic is certain to be an ongoing one.

<https://counciloncj.org/impact-report-covid-19-and-domestic-violence-trends/#:~:text=Based%20on%20a%20review%20of.imposed%20pandemic%2Drelated%20lockdown%20orders.>



Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Evidence from a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

In March and April of 2020, government leaders began to impose stay-at-home orders to help contain the spread of the coronavirus. This report, by a team of researchers led by sociologist [Alex R. Piquero](#) of the University of Miami, was based on a systematic review of multiple studies that compared changes in the number of domestic violence incidents before and after jurisdictions put lockdown restrictions in place.

Findings

- Based on a review of 12 U.S. studies, most of which included data from multiple cities, shows that domestic violence incidents increased 8.1% after jurisdictions imposed pandemic-related lockdown orders.
- Unlike some early reports on domestic violence trends that relied exclusively on police calls for service, the studies covered by this review also drew on data from crime reports, emergency hotline registries, hospital and other health records, and additional administrative documents.
- While the precise dynamics driving the increase are unclear, lockdowns and pandemic-related economic impacts likely exacerbated factors typically associated with domestic violence, such as increased male unemployment, stress associated with childcare and homeschooling, and increased financial insecurity. Poor coping strategies, including the increased use of alcohol and other substances, may have elevated the risk of abuse.
- The authors also conclude that COVID-19 left parents and children confined to their homes, cut off from friends, neighbors, colleagues, and others who might have reported signs of abuse and violence and intervened to help potential victims escape violent situations.

A [separate report](#) to the Commission in August documented a 9.7% increase in domestic violence calls for service during March and April, starting before state-level stay-at-home mandates began. Applied nationally, this finding from Assistant Professors [Emily Leslie](#) and [Riley Wilson](#) of Brigham Young University, means there were approximately 1,330 more domestic violence calls for service per day across the U.S. during the time period.

READ THE REPORT



<https://www.brproud.com/news/local-news/domestic-violence-related-deaths-double-in-ebr-during-2021/>

February 17, 2022
BATON ROUGE, LA

Domestic Violence-Related Deaths Double in EBR During 2021

BATON ROUGE, La. (BRPROUD) — In an annual report on domestic and dating violence in East Baton Rouge Parish from the district attorney's office, it showed that deaths nearly doubled in 2021.

"It is my mission to assist our community in holding abusers accountable and providing avenues for victims to find safety and restoration from violence," said EBR District Attorney Hillar Moore.

The report said challenges came from strained resources within law enforcement, courts, providers, and DA office staff as well as difficulty keeping accurate data on incidents and arrests.

The district attorney's office said its office and "Stop the Loss" teams established procedures to track domestic and dating arrests, track outreach to victims, referrals for alleged abusers and data on accused re-offenders.

[Stop the Loss](#) is an initiative created by the district attorney's office and local law enforcement aimed at identifying abuse, holding offenders accountable and offering services. Through this initiative, the district attorney's office hopes to prevent domestic violence deaths through methods of identification and intervention.

Domestic violence-related deaths in 2021

The EBR district attorney's office reported 36 domestic violence-related deaths in 2021, 23 of which were intimate partners. Out of those deaths, the report said 12 victims were women and 24 were men. The report states 31 of the victims were Black, three were white and two were Hispanic.

Data collected by the district attorney's office reports the most commonly used weapon in domestic violence incidents was firearms.

The total of deaths in 2021 was the result of 30 incidents of domestic and dating violence, according to the district attorney's office.

For context, the report showed previous years' death records — 19 domestic violence deaths in 2020 and four in 2019.

Tracking domestic violence data in EBR

Baton Rouge City Police, East Baton Rouge Clerk of Court and East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office (EBRSO) each independently track data on domestic and dating violence within the parish.

According to the district attorney's report, city police track arrests, the clerk of court track protective orders issued, and the sheriff's office tracks its own data on domestic violence-related arrests.

The report said Baton Rouge police made 2,154 arrested consisting of the following charges:

Battery of a dating partner
Aggravated assault of a dating partner
Domestic abuse battery
Domestic abuse aggravated assault
Violation of protective order

In 2021, the 19th Judicial District Court issued 1,200 orders — the report cites this as a significant increase from past years' average of 300. The district attorney's office believes Stop the Loss contributed to this increase as well as an increase in court-ordered "Firearms Information and Firearms Declaration of Non-Possession."

EBRSO's arrest data showed a slight increase over a three-year period, with a total of 1,511 arrests in 2021, according to the report.

Services for domestic-violence victims in EBR

The district attorney's office says victims can find services at the [Capital Area Family Justice Center](#) (CAJFC) which serves EBR, West Baton Rouge, Ascension, East Feliciana Iberville, Pointe Coupee, and Livingston parishes.

Other resources where victims can find help:

[East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office Crime Victim Reparations](#) — Call 225-239-7850

Iris Domestic Violence Center (24 Hour Hotline) — Call 225-389-3001

Baton Rouge City Police, [Victim Assistance](#) — Call 225-389-3800

[The Butterfly Society](#) — Call 225-347-7725

[Family Services of Greater Baton Rouge](#) — Call 225-924-0123

[Louisiana Automated Victim Notification System](#) — Call 866-528-6748

"As a community, we must act, offer genuine services and support, and listen," said Moore. "Domestic and dating violence-related deaths are preventable, but it takes a community response that does not accept coercive and abusive control to demand that what was once only a 'family matter,' no longer be tolerated by society," reads the report.

3 Murder-Suicides in A Weekend Show Surge in Deadly Domestic Violence: 'It Just Keeps Coming'



Myesha Davis had finally mustered the courage to leave her fiancé, whose increasingly controlling behavior made her rethink the relationship, her family members said.

She spent hours with her aunt Saturday night, the two women planning their futures together. They planned to enroll in trucking school and coordinate work schedules to help each other with child care. Davis, 27, wanted more independence after her fiancé, Vinnie Mackie Jr., said he thought "her place was in the house," according to her aunt.

Less than 24 hours later, Mackie armed himself with a gun and shot Davis to death inside their apartment Sunday evening. Then, he ended his own life.

Their four children — the oldest just 8 years old — saw everything.

"There I was, not knowing that tomorrow wasn't promised for her," her aunt Tiffany Davis said. "I wish I would have just kept her with me."

The shooting was among three murder-suicides that unfolded last weekend across the Baton Rouge region, including one in Hammond. Three more deadly domestic violence shootings followed, all within a week. East Baton Rouge Parish has recorded more than two dozen such killings so far this year — a record rate of violence keeping pace with an unprecedented overall murder rate.

Many experts highlight ongoing fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. But pinpointing an exact cause is near impossible, and the problem extends far beyond Baton Rouge. In some surrounding parishes, concerns about increased domestic violence are exacerbated by the impacts of Hurricane Ida.

"Instead of asking why the victim stays in an abusive relationship, we should be looking at the barriers to leaving," East Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillar Moore III said. "COVID-19 aggravated these barriers — income, family support, affordable housing and daycare, isolation, and maybe most important, mental health."

Deadly Baton Rouge shooting marks 7th murder in 8 days — as parish surpasses 100 for the year
'The most unforgiveable thing'

After the pandemic hit, Davis watched her world shrink.

She and Mackie both lost their jobs, and she helped him launch a heating and air conditioning business. He started working long hours, becoming the sole breadwinner and leaving her often overwhelmed with child care, especially after she gave birth to their youngest in July.

Even when schools and day cares began reopening, she worried about sending the kids back and risking COVID exposure.

Family members said they believe Mackie became more controlling during the pandemic, though they never suspected physical violence in the relationship. They said he would get upset when Davis spent too much time with her relatives.

Still, Davis hesitated to leave, unsure how she would support her children without him. But her family offered the reassurance she needed: She was strong and capable, they told her, with a bunch of people standing behind her.

Relatives said Davis had recently told Mackie she was serious about breaking up — something she had brought up several months earlier, then agreed to reconcile after he proposed.

When police responded to the crime scene the night of Oct. 24, officers found her engagement ring sitting on a box of ammunition in the kitchen, relatives said.

The shooting was reported to authorities only after a friend called Davis that evening and **one of the children answered, informing the caller that mom and dad were dead**, according to family members. Davis had three children with Mackie, and the couple was raising his son from another relationship, too. Her surviving relatives have taken them in since her death.

While the younger ones are probably too little to remember their mom, the older siblings will grow up with horrific scenes from her last moments seared into their memories.

"We have no clue how long they were in that apartment, with their mother's brains blown out," Tiffany Davis said. "That's the most unforgivable thing to me."

Baton Rouge's most murderous year on record: How gun violence surged amid pandemic
'One of the most difficult issues'

So far this year, 33 lives have been lost to domestic violence across East Baton Rouge, according to data provided by the district attorney — with still over two months left in 2021.

The parish recorded 19 in all of 2020.

Moore said about 20% of the 13,000 or so cases his office handles annually involve some form of domestic violence, showing how prevalent such crimes were even before the recent spike. Other jurisdictions, including the Florida Parishes, have seen a similar uptick.

Livingston Parish Sheriff Jason Ard said domestic violence reports are projected to rise for the third consecutive year in 2021.

"It's one of the most difficult issues we deal with," 21st Judicial District Attorney Scott Perrilloux said. "It's not any one particular demographic or economic status. It doesn't really seem to matter."

24 hours of rising domestic violence in Baton Rouge: 'It's happening in the shadows'

Victims in rural areas often have the hardest time getting help because of transportation challenges and limited legal services, among other issues, said Nnenna Minimah, executive director of [Southeast Advocates for Family Empowerment](#). Her organization serves a wide swath of eastern Louisiana, including the Florida parishes.

Despite those barriers, Minimah said Hurricane Ida seemed to push some survivors trapped in abusive relationships to their breaking point, finally prompting them to reach out for help. She said even though Livingston has a higher population, most of the requests to her organization come from Tangipahoa.

A familiar pattern unfolded after the storm, said Mariah Wineski, executive director of the [Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#).

First came radio silence as the power grid failed, causing an initial dip in hotline calls — and then a huge spike in reports as communication systems came back online, she said.

Just last week, a man shot his wife to death at their Hammond home, then barricaded himself inside. Law enforcement later found Anthony Davis dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. His wife, Heidi Davis, was a mother of two and registered nurse at North Oaks Hospital.

"She was truly one to light up a room and was known to be full of life," her [obituary](#) says.

Law enforcement officials have not released a motive for the case, but court records show Heidi had filed for divorce in August.

The deadly attack unfolded about a month after another murder-suicide in St. Francisville, where a man stalked his estranged wife for weeks before killing them both.

Marshall Rayburn had recently been released on bond and assigned a GPS ankle monitor after being accused of repeatedly drugging and raping his wife during their 15-year marriage. Family members and local officials blamed the monitoring company for failing to properly supervise him.

'Worthless' ankle monitor fails to keep man from stalking estranged wife before murder-suicide
West Feliciana Sheriff Brian Spillman said officials are rethinking their ankle monitor system after it failed so spectacularly. He said the murder-suicide came amid an increase in domestic violence calls overall.

"We're watching this trend, and if anything, we're being more careful and more meticulous in these investigations," he said.

Spillman said his office is getting deputies specialized training to handle these kinds of sensitive situations that can be challenging for law enforcement, especially when victims are afraid to cooperate.

'It just keeps coming'

One possible explanation for the recent eruption of domestic violence focuses on the accumulation of chaotic national news events that have dominated discourse over the last couple years, from the presidential election and pandemic, to racial justice protests and mask mandates.

"They have a tendency to destabilize systems and decrease trust in systems," Wineski said. She described a general sense of chaos resulting from the "fraying of community ties" that can create the right environment for violence to flourish.

Watching the rise in domestic homicides has been incredibly frustrating because of all the resources being poured into educating people on the issue, said John Price, executive director of [IRIS Domestic Violence Center](#) in Baton Rouge.

24 hours of rising domestic violence in Baton Rouge: 'It's happening in the shadows'

Twahna Harris, founder of [The Butterfly Society](#) in Baton Rouge, has felt the strain acutely. She spends countless hours comforting victims and their families.

"You put out one fire, and here's another; you put that one out and here's another," she said. "It just keeps coming."

She also pushed back on the idea that the pandemic is the primary driver of the ongoing spike in violence. She said blaming the pandemic starts to sound like giving abusers a pass. But as the body count continues to rise, Harris finds herself wondering what her organization could do differently to stop the violence. What are they missing?

Domestic abuse is all about power and control, she said, and it can be difficult to spot the subtle indicators: the frequent phone calls, minor physical violence played off as a joke, gradual isolation from loved ones.

Even when a victim decides to leave, Harris said the consequences can be fatal: "Walking away is the deadliest time in a relationship."

Those words came into sharp focus as Harris embraced the mother and grandmother of Shayla James, a Southern University sophomore killed by her boyfriend last week in her Burbank Drive apartment after she expressed a desire to see someone else.

Relatives, friends and classmates gathered on Southern campus and released purple and white balloons in her honor. Purple is the official color for National Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October; it was also Shayla's favorite.

"Ms. James made the decision to walk away from her situation because she wanted better," Harris said, standing tall in her purple high-heeled pumps. "She knew she deserved better. And her life was stolen from her. How selfish of him."

James, 19, planned to become an elementary school teacher after graduating from college. She left behind three younger sisters, who lost a magnificent role model and confidante, their mother said. "Every time I talk about her, I get chills, like my baby is wrapping her arms around me," Shondreka James said. "I have another angel sitting on my shoulder."

Shayla was fiercely independent and unflappable, disinclined to stress about much of anything, her mom said. She was a great student, the first in her immediate family to attend college. She had friends all over the country.

The man who took her life, Kenyon Walker, gave them no reason to suspect his capacity for violence, relatives said. The two had been dating for several months. "He ruined two families, mine and his," Shondreka James said.

"But I want to focus on remembering the 19 years we had with Shayla," she continued. "It's hard to explain your hurt without crying, but you don't want your tears to be your story."

Those experiencing domestic abuse can contact the statewide [Louisiana Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at (888) 411-1333 or [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at (800) 799-7233.



<https://www.wbrz.com/news/domestic-violence-deaths-surge-bloody-weekend-leaves-5-dead-in-ebz-parish/>

October 25, 2021
BATON ROUGE, LA

Domestic Violence Deaths Surge; Bloody Weekend Leaves 5 Dead in EBR Parish

BATON ROUGE - Domestic violence prosecutors are calling it one of the worst weekends for domestic violence in recent years. Over a 48-hour window, five people would be dead in two murder-suicides and one murder.

The violence began Friday night on Pecan Tree Drive. That's where deputies said Carlos Plaza shot and killed his estranged wife, Luz Posada, before turning the gun on himself.

Sunday night, detectives said Vinnie Mackie killed Myesha Davis before also shooting himself. Overnight, there was a fifth death. Investigators said Ebonie Hartwell shot and killed her boyfriend Dario Stanley after a disagreement on Metairie Drive.

"Our office is struggling like everyone else with the vast amount of people trying to offer services and trying to prosecute properly and hold people accountable and hold offenders accountable," domestic violence prosecutor Melanie Fields said.

Last year, the parish logged 19 domestic violence deaths, a record number. This year, there have been 33 domestic violence deaths with two months left in the year.

The WBRZ Investigative Unit also learned that protective orders have increased four times from prior years. The court is issuing them as a condition of bail for domestic violence cases.

"For us as law enforcement, all we can do is identify them and offer services and intervene before the fatality," Fields said. "The community, if you see it, you want to urge that person to be supportive. You can't make someone leave a relationship but you can urge them to seek out counseling or help."

Sandra Hally is a domestic abuse survivor. She has the scars on her back that show the extraordinary abuse she endured. Her alleged abuser is set to go to trial next month, and she's still having to undergo dental work for the beatings she received.

"Some people are afraid to talk. They are ashamed of what people would think," Hally said. "But it's a reason why I made it out, and I know God wants me to help somebody."

Anyone who needs help can call the [Iris Domestic Violence Center](#). Their 24-hour hotline is 225-389-3001.

Resources can also be found with [The Butterfly Society](#) at 225-347-7725.

More resources can be found below.

[- Family Services of Greater Baton Rouge](#)

[- National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

[- Crime Stoppers](#)

[- Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)



<https://www.brproud.com/news/local-news/east-baton-rouge-surpasses-2020-domestic-violence-related-deaths/>

October 6, 2021
BATON ROUGE, LA

East Baton Rouge Surpasses 2020 Domestic Violence-Related Deaths

BATON ROUGE, La (BRPROUD) – Domestic violence includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically and in East Baton Rouge, there has been an increase with a current number of 25 deaths in comparison to last year's 19.

Executive Director John Price of the Iris Domestic Violence Center said stay-at-home orders during the height of the pandemic left victims trapped at home with their abusers.

"They don't get the normal opportunity to get away, use their cell phones, and call to seek services and assistance. This morning I had a woman that's been married 37 years calling, talking about the abuse that's been going on for 37 years," said Price.

Price said understanding what victims are going through is one of the first steps in helping them. He also mentions being strategic when approaching a domestic violence victim and when confronting them on the abuse that you may be observing.

"You don't have a job, and you don't have a car, and you don't have a bank account in your name, and you don't have a family willing to assist you or friends. What options do you have in order for you to leave? Most of these people have also defended this person from their families and loves ones, they don't want to admit what's been going on," said Price.

For many of these crimes, the abusers aren't first-time offenders and while Price suggests more can be done on the judicial side, Sgt. Robert Cook with Baton Rouge Police Department said law enforcement can only do as much as a witness's cooperation allows them to.

In an annual domestic violence report by the District Attorney's office, DA Hillar Moore said, "Most domestic violence reports his office has reviewed receive dismissal request because victims are either coerced into dropping charges or terrified of retaliation."

Price hopes that a change in COVID-19 restrictions will allow victims to make empowered decisions for themselves.

"I don't know the fears and concerns that that person has so we're going to support their decision, whatever it may be, and that's how the public should treat it too unless you're walking in their shoes, you don't know what that feels like," said Price.

If you or someone you know is in need of domestic violence resources call the IRIS Domestic Violence Center 24 hour crisis line at (225) 389-3001 or visit www.stopdv.org.

A 'Brutal' Year for Baton Rouge Women: Domestic Violence Deaths in 2020 Surpass 10-Year Record



Zachary Police and others work the scene outside a home on Avenue E in Zachary, where a person was fatally stabbed around 9 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020. One person is in custody, police said. The East Baton Rouge Parish Coroner's Office transported a body from the scene shortly later.

Domestic violence claimed 19 lives in East Baton Rouge Parish in 2020, the highest number in at least a decade, and more than quadrupled the previous year.

Advocates and law enforcement officials say the pandemic played a major role. Isolated at home with their abusers, victims struggled to survive in increasingly dangerous and volatile situations where violence became more frequent or escalated more quickly.

"It's been a bad year," said Mariah Wineski, executive director of the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "What COVID did is create the perfect environment for domestic violence to flourish."

In record-breaking year for Baton Rouge murders, these lives were taken: stories of loss in 2020

Misdemeanor cases for domestic violence were relatively steady — and officials suspect underreported — despite the much higher death toll.

"It seemed this year that the level of violence committed against women has been much higher," said East Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillar Moore III. **"That is, the brutality of it has seemed to increase this year."**

Domestic abuse made up close to half of the Baton Rouge Police Department's major assaults cases.

Red flags

The warnings started early.

Twahna Harris, who leads the domestic violence nonprofit, spent much of mid-March fielding calls from victims just trying to survive hour to hour, as public health guidance encouraged people to stay home and avoid potential exposure to the virus.

With the threat of a lockdown looming and the countless unknowns of the pandemic ahead, many victims could not see a path out of their abuser's control as the world closed around them.

Domestic violence victims vulnerable as coronavirus causes isolation; help still available

Harris, herself a survivor of abuse, sounded exhausted and hopeless as she explained back in March that all she could tell victims was to find a quiet place, like a bathroom or closet, to escape their abuser for a few minutes.

"It's so hard...finding the words to say to them. I find it to be challenging in a time like this," she said, her voice breaking. "Just letting them know that we're with them."

Baton Rouge officials had seen a similar pattern of relationship and family violence in 2017 following the chaos and traumatic events of the previous year. Large-scale civil unrest after the death of Alton Sterling, a fatal police ambush and a catastrophic flood had brutalized the city, leaving many without security or stability.

That year saw 14 domestic violence homicides, Moore said. Financial strain, cramped living quarters, job uncertainty, limited outreach for victims and intense emotional fallout strained already-abusive relationships until they snapped. When the coronavirus emerged last year, officials feared it would create similar conditions.

Nine months later, the finalized numbers confirm those initial fears.

Pressure points

The death toll includes girlfriends, like 21-year-old Kennedy Smith who was stabbed to death by her boyfriend; mothers, like 40-year-old Brenda Mullens, who was shot and killed by her ex-boyfriend after she refused to let him in her home with her three children; law enforcement officials, like Lt. Glenn Hutto Jr., a Baton Rouge Police officer who died at the hands of a man who had just killed his girlfriend's stepfather; and toddlers, like two-year-old Azariah Thomas.

Baton Rouge woman wanted to help abusive boyfriend before fatal stabbing: 'She didn't deserve this'

As the pandemic dragged on, the stress and uncertainty of a tumultuous year ramped up existing tension. Children were pulled from classrooms to keep them safe and many primary breadwinners lost jobs, straining relationships already pulled taut.

According to Melanie Fields, a domestic violence prosecutor, disputes between an abuser and a victim that turn violent often involve allegations of cheating, usually originating with a cell phone. But 2020 had an added layer of stress.

For instance, when the first round of stimulus checks showed up, the fight over who the money belonged to and how it should be spent often resulted in violence, Fields said.

These breaking points played out in the end-of-year statistics provided by Moore's office.

Baton Rouge's Family Court remained open even during the early lockdown, and applications for temporary restraining orders increased slightly — though Fields noted the uptick may have been steeper if victims didn't have to go right back home after filing for the order.

But even that "slight increase" is remarkable, according to Moore, because "access to justice was tough to get" in the initial days of the pandemic response.

While the tally of domestic violence misdemeanors was similar to 2019, Fields and Moore believe that a vast number were underreported because victims were stuck behind closed doors with their abusers, limiting their ability to contact authorities.

"We're normally always underreported," Moore said, "But I think this year you're going to find...that victims are still underreporting at a higher rate this year than any other year before because they're with the abuser."

24 hours of rising domestic violence in Baton Rouge: 'It's happening in the shadows'

Violent crimes related to domestic violence, on the other hand, have increased significantly.

Fields said these are hard to ignore because someone usually ends up in the hospital. Baton Rouge Police Department's major assaults division reported that 309 out of 739 total cases were the result of domestic violence — approximately 42%.

Stopping the loss

Amid the rising violence found behind closed doors across the city, there are efforts underway to help. In late October the Capital Area Family Justice Center opened, which serves as a "one-stop shop" for domestic violence victims to seek housing options and legal services. Weeks later, IRIS Domestic Violence Center opened a new, larger shelter serving East Baton Rouge and surrounding parishes.

At Moore's office, his team has been working to implement their "Stop the Loss" initiative, which aims to identify known, chronic domestic violence offenders and intervene before tragedy strikes.

The process to pull together data and develop protocols has taken the better part of two years, but Moore said an "earnest" implementation has begun in recent months. Part of their model is to offer parallel services for both victims and the abusers as a way to address violence.

"It's meant to...offer services for both the offenders and victims — unless the offender is so serious we have to just work on intense prosecution," Fields said. "The design is to curb domestic violence as a whole, but most importantly to stop the loss of life."

For homeless domestic violence survivors, new funding will help find them a safe place to live

Eventually, the coronavirus will begin to subside. Moore hopes that then things start to change.

"When we're able to open up more, [victims] will be able to go to safe refuges and friends and family," Moore said. "They'll talk to them like they can't talk to them now because they're stuck at home with the abuser."

December 8, 2021

CALCASIEU PARISH

District Attorney Creates Special Victims Unit

Calcasieu Parish District Attorney Stephen Dwight joined local law enforcement and officials with several agencies Tuesday to announce the creation of the Special Victims Unit within the district attorney's office.

Dwight said a special victims unit that brings various agencies together is needed because domestic violence and sex crime cases have risen steadily within the parish over the last decade. That, along with the rise in domestic violence calls during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates why victims of these crimes require special attention and care, he said.

"These are the cases that really tug at your heart and emotions and keep you up at night," he said. "That's why they need this special attention."

The priority with the SVU office, Dwight said, will be to contact victims early on and help them get through the legal process.

Lake Charles Police Chief Shawn Caldwell and Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Stitch Guillory spoke of the impact upon victims of these crimes. Guillory said these types of crimes occur all too often, with some victims being unaware of available resources like changing their locks or providing a safe house.

"Just know you're not going through it alone," he said. "We stand behind you, and we want to help you through the process. By centralizing this thing through the D.A.'s office, we'll be able to better inform our victims where those assets are."

Kathy Williams is the executive director at Oasis is a Safe Haven, the only Lake Charles-based nonprofit shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. She said the SVU and the partnerships between various agencies is necessary because women are killed in Louisiana at twice the national average.

David Duplechian with the Family and Youth Counseling Agency said the unit will address the public scrutiny victims of domestic abuse and sex crimes often face.

"This is just another step toward making sure those victims are taken care of," he said.

Tammy Vincent with the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program at Lake Charles Memorial Hospital said sex crimes in the community have increased annually, with 45 percent of victims being under the age of 18.

"I believe a community that's willing to raise the standard of care with the special team of experience, consistency, collaboration and compassion for these victims will see better outcomes," she said.

Assistant District Attorney Hope Buford will lead the SVU as its section chief. The team will also include two assistant district attorneys, one trial assistant team leader, two trial assistants and two victim assistance coordinators.

Dwight said he formerly sat on the Oasis board and heard about various cases. "It was gut wrenching," he said. "Now, I'm sitting on this side of the table and I see a lot more of it. It's something that I want to change." Dwight said there is no additional funding for the special victims unit.

STRANGULATION, BRAIN INJURY, PTSD

**UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**



<https://www.kalb.com/content/news/Victim-of-domestic-violence-in-Vernon-Parish-shares-her-story-563752261.html>

October 23, 2019

VERNON PARISH

Victim of Domestic Violence in Vernon Parish Shares Her Story



According to [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#), nearly 20 people in the U.S. are physically abused by an intimate partner every minute. Do the math, and that's more than 10 million people in a year.

On Tuesday, Oct. 15, Vernon Parish Judge, Tony Bennett [made a ruling in a highly publicized domestic violence case](#), finding the defendant Michael Roberts guilty of one felony count of domestic abuse strangulation, after the couple's home surveillance system caught the whole thing on tape.

"What they will see is an eight-and-a-half long minute video of me being strangled, beaten, and boot kicked in my home," Jennifer Roberts, Michael Roberts' ex-wife said.

Jennifer Roberts shared with News Channel 5 the disturbing footage captured from her home surveillance system on March 20, 2018, as her then-husband Michael Roberts attacked her.

"The woman who was the victim in the Leesville case came close to being a homicide," Debra Faircloth, an advocate against domestic violence said.

As a result of the attack, hospital reports show Jennifer suffered numerous injuries to her back, head, and neck.

"It took over 560 days to get it to trial," Jennifer stated.

Many may wonder, why did it take so long for Jennifer's case to get to trial? The answer: prosecutors couldn't decide whether to charge Michael Roberts with a felony or a misdemeanor.

"The reason why I would never drop the charges is because it was caught on videotape," Jennifer stated.

In court on Oct 15, the defense argued the charge should be a misdemeanor. The defense claimed they did not clear evidence of strangulation. In their closing argument, defense attorney, Elvin Fontenot said

his client is, “innocent until proven guilty,” and he believed prosecutors failed to provide undeniable evidence.

However, in the bench trial, Judge Bennett ruled against the defense. Bennett said he did find enough evidence, citing the incident reports and saying he saw at least two occasions when the defendant pressed one of his body parts against the victim’s throat.

“In my case, there were five separate strangulations to where I lost consciousness,” Jennifer said. “Strangulation is very serious,” Faircloth stated. “Nobody should minimize its effects.”

Faircloth works for an organization called Faith House, which is a community partner for the [Family Justice Center](#) in the Cenla area, and Ms. Faircloth assisted Jennifer in getting justice. “It’s been a long, hard road,” Faircloth said. “It’s a very important case.”

The reason why this particular case is important is because the victim says she’s on a mission challenging the state’s laws regarding strangulation.

“The law needs to be changed in Louisiana,” Jennifer said. “The Gwen’s law is great but unless it’s done properly, it’s not enough. And they’ve found a way around the Domestic Abuse Act in Louisiana.”

Another issue Jennifer has with the law is why did her ex-husband only receive one felony count, even when the judge himself found more than one attempt to strangle the victim?

“My case became personal to me because this is the way I am showing my daughter and other women in Vernon Parish, Louisiana to stand-up and say, ‘no more.’” Jennifer stated.

As a result, Jennifer is now in Washington D.C. meeting with some of the most powerful lawmakers in the country, pushing for a change.

“According to a reputable nation study done by a couple of scholars, more than 90,000 Louisiana women end up in the emergency rooms and urgent care facilities each year to have injuries treated that they suffered from someone who said, ‘I love you’ to them.”



ACCORD Corporation
Public Service

petechiae, blood shot eyes ...
m.facebook.com
November 13, 2020

Strangulation Can Increase Risk of Stroke and Brain Injuries

If you have ever been
strangled by your partner you
may experience petechiae to
eyeball, eyelid,
bloody red eyeball(s),
vision changes, and/or
droopy eyelid.
(strangulationinstitute.com)

Contact the Domestic
Violence Hotline if you
would like more
information or support
1-800-593-5322



ACCORD Corporation

Strangulation can cause many symptoms including petechiae, blood shot eyes, and more. Strangulation is dangerous and can be life threatening – event days, weeks, or months after it has occurred. If you have questions, or need support please call us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-593-5322.

2022 Cheyenne Regional Medical Center

Strangulation/Choking

The definition of strangulation or being choked is a person knowingly or intentionally impeding the breathing or circulation of the blood of another person by applying pressure on the throat or neck of the other person. Pressure on the structures of the neck can cause unseen and unrecognized injuries. Through years of research there is better understanding now about the seriousness of non-lethal strangulation.

Intimate partner strangulation is a very serious form of domestic violence or abuse. Strangulation has been found to be a strong indicator of increasingly severe violence leading to possibility of homicide. Once a person has been strangled and did not lead to their death, their chances of homicide increase 750% if they are strangled again. Strangulation has been shown to be an ultimate form of power and control, where the batterer can demonstrate absolute control over their victim.

Strangulation or “being choked” can cause death or other permanent side effects. The amount of pressure that it takes to open a can of soda on the arteries of the neck has the potential cause death or permanent damage.

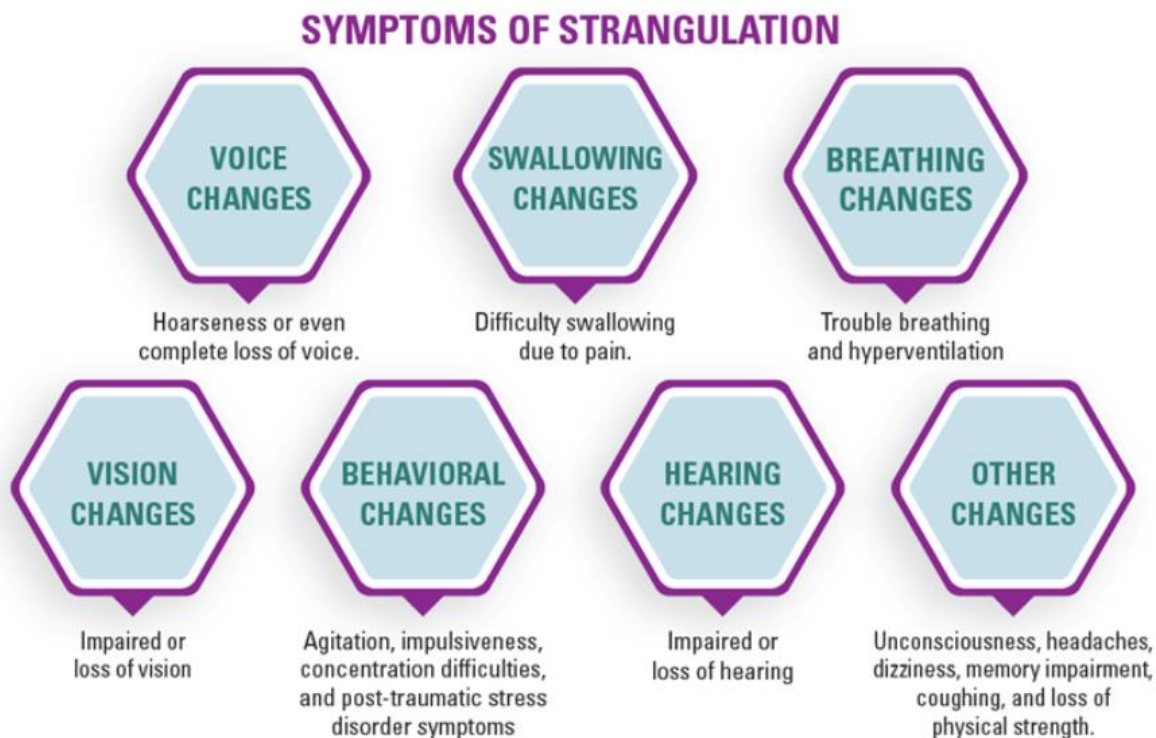


Figure 1: Categories and Specific Symptoms of Strangulation

October 1, 2018

The Importance of Appropriate Strangulation Response



Strangulation Response

sog.unc.edu



https://www.google.com/search?q=images%20strangulation&tbm=isch&tbs=rimg:CXsfl2LNSXbOYbc206X8ZEussgIMCgIIABAAOgQIARAA&bih=748&biw=1264&client=safari&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CAIQrnZqFwoTCKiSrYmlt_YCFQAAAAdAAAAABAe#imgsrc=fMKgGOTRsQmHgM

October 13, 2021

Manual Strangulation is the Biggest Sign Domestic Abuse Will Turn Deadly, Experts Say

*No one has been charged. But advocates say the Petito case reiterates a point they have long been trying to make: **If they strangle you, they will likely kill you.***



On Tuesday, a Wyoming coroner announced Gabby Petito was strangled to death. While authorities have not yet charged anyone with the 22-year-old's murder — her now-missing fiancé has been [named "a person of interest"](#) — this most recent development in the Petito homicide case follows weeks of speculation that [she was a victim of domestic abuse](#).

Electric air taxi by Wisk Aero

Authorities have not confirmed that information. But just weeks before her death, a man who called 911 [told Moab police he saw Brian Laundrie slapping Petito](#).

Subsequent police body-cam footage taken from that day [shows Petito telling police Laundrie hit her](#).



The video, coupled with new information that Petito was strangled to death, has disturbed local domestic violence advocates, who say they have long seen a link between strangulation and domestic homicide.

Sandra Ziebold is the executive director of Beacon of Hope Crisis Center in Indianapolis, and said she has seen an increase in victims who have been victims of strangulation.

Since the start of 2021, her organization has served 1,073 victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. More than 200 of those victims reported strangulation, or had neck and head trauma due to domestic violence.

It is a problem that continues to get worse.

"Nonfatal strangulation has been reported in nearly 45 percent of attempted homicides in domestic violence situations against women, and 97 percent of victims are strangled manually," Ziebold said.

RELATED: [Gabby Petito case focuses attention on missing and murdered indigenous women](#)

Her organization saw such an increase in reported strangulations, that they began collecting data on their own. What they found aligned with previous reports from researchers and law enforcement professionals concluding nonfatal strangulation is a leading indicator of escalating violence in a relationship, and an important risk factor for homicide.

"That data collected, just time after time, shows that a strangler typically ends up committing other homicides. And oftentimes, just with the gun. Most often, even cop killers, you can typically link them back to having been prior stranglers," Ziebold said.

RELATED: [What can the Gabby Petito case teach us about domestic violence?](#)

[According to the San Diego-based Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention](#), a woman who has suffers a nonfatal strangulation incident with her intimate partner is 750% more likely to be killed by the same person with a gun.

70% of victims who are strangled believe they will lose their life during the event, and indeed death can occur in [just under 5 minutes](#). Loss of consciousness can occur in [less than 10 seconds](#).

Despite the brutality of the crime, strangulation is not always a violation that can be easily seen.

"Sometimes strangulation leaves a mark, many times it does not. So someone can be strangled, and there be no external evidence, only internal. It could just be a hoarseness of the throat. And just from that trauma alone, they could later have a stroke and die, and you would never even know it on an external presentation," Ziebold said.

RELATED: [Central Indiana advocates, families remember 34 lives lost to domestic violence last year](#)

The concerning uptick in domestic violence is something experts say is [directly connected to the pandemic](#).

Back in December 2020, Beacon of Hope spokesperson Jackie Bowman told 13News the center's advocates saw more people facing some form of domestic violence since last year.

"We have seen a remarkable increase in not the just the number of calls that we get, but the complexity we get," Bowman explained, who added [requests for protection orders were up 148%](#) since 2019.

RELATED: [Indianapolis woman speaks about search for mother, says more needs to be done to help find missing people of color](#)

At that time, incidents of stalking and harassment [were up 66%](#), while domestic violence incidents where the victim is [strangled by their abuser were up 212%](#).

At least 34 people in central Indiana have died because of domestic violence this year.

RESOURCE: [Contact Beacon of Hope here](#)

Experts believe what makes manual strangulation a precursor to that type of deadly abuse we've seen across Indiana is that, in the moment of violence, a perpetrator has complete control over a victim.

The psychological trauma for survivors of having been controlled that way is one Ziebold said, can be severe.

"Certainly those that have been victimized ... there's a lifetime of trauma, and we are focused on helping helping them get the care that they need for sure," she said.

RELATED: [Experts say 'Missing White Women Syndrome' played role in media coverage of Gabby Petito](#)

Officials estimated Petito's time of death to be three to four weeks before her body was found Sept. 19 in Grand Teton National Park.

Brian Laundrie, her fiancé at the time and a person of interest in her case, has not been seen [since mid-September](#).

More information about Domestic Violence Month can be found through the [Domestic Violence Network](#) and [Silent No More, Inc.](#)

What other people are reading:

[Wyoming coroner to hold news conference on Gabby Petito autopsy Tuesday afternoon](#)



The Connection Between Domestic Violence and PTSD

Domestic violence is a traumatic experience that affects more than 10 million American men and women every year. Because it often takes place behind closed doors, it is easy to overlook or explain away.

Abuse can take many forms, ranging from physical and emotional abuse, sexual assault, financial control, and psychological actions or threats meant to harm or influence an intimate partner. It can happen at any age and affects people of all sexual orientations, ethnicities, religions, sexes and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Abuse victims may experience a wide range of physical and mental health symptoms resulting from domestic abuse trauma, including depression, suicidal tendencies, panic attacks, substance abuse disorders, and sexual and reproductive health issues.

Domestic Violence and PTSD

One of the lesser acknowledged outcomes of domestic violence is [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#), a psychiatric disorder in which a person has difficulty recovering after experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event. It can result from any traumatic event, whether a war or serious accident, but domestic violence is an often under-recognized cause.

Symptoms of PTSD are sometimes difficult to establish, as there is considerable overlap between PTSD and other [mental health conditions](#). However, symptoms are normally defined by three overarching categories:

Avoidance: Avoiding reminders or “triggers” of the traumatic event, such as people, places, thoughts or events

Arousal and reactivity: Sudden inexplicable anger, outbursts, difficulty being reached emotionally, feeling numb, trouble sleeping and startling easily

Reliving the event: Being confronted by the emotional trauma of the event suddenly and without an obvious reason, resulting in emotional outbursts, chills, heart palpitations, extreme anxiety and other symptoms

Left untreated, PTSD can cause long-term mental health effects, including anger management issues, severe depression and intense loneliness. Additionally, untreated PTSD can increase the likelihood of developing several life-threatening conditions including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and substance abuse disorders.

PTSD can develop in anyone experiencing a major life-threatening event, and this includes domestic violence, which exposes the victim to varying degrees of fear, vulnerability and helplessness. The fear experienced from a traumatic event can become overwhelming but is often not dealt with immediately, due to the abuser living in close quarters or being in the victim’s life regularly.

“The likelihood of PTSD increases after a domestic abuse event, though its effects can be mitigated through seeking emotional support,” says [Dr. Mary Wynn Hill](#), a board-certified psychiatrist and medical

director of the Beaufort Memorial Mental Health Unit. “However, this is not always possible, as it requires trusted family and friends who are willing to listen and potentially intervene.”

Other risk factors that increase the likelihood of a domestic violence victim developing PTSD include sustaining a physical injury, feeling helpless, lack of supportive community, having to deal with additional stressors before and after the event, and having a history of mental illness or addiction.

Treatment for PTSD

Treating PTSD in domestic abuse victims can be complicated, and there is no one-size-fits-all treatment. A [mental health professional](#) can devise a treatment plan to address specific symptoms.

“If the abuse victim is still partnered with the abuser, it is unlikely that PTSD treatment will be highly effective,” says Dr. Hill, who sees patients at [Beaufort Memorial Sea Island Psychiatry](#). “Both domestic violence and PTSD must be addressed at the same time. Victims who feel trapped in their relationships or are hesitant to seek treatment due to ongoing threats of violence may find it increasingly difficult to receive or benefit from proper treatment.”

Additionally, abuse victims often experience more than one mental health problem, such as depression, addiction or suicidal thoughts, making it more difficult to define PTSD as a significant contributing factor.

When PTSD is properly diagnosed, it can be treated successfully.

“Treatment often involves cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which can help victims manage the trauma of their experience,” Dr. Hill says. “There are many different types of CBT that can help people who have experienced domestic violence. Depending on the person, we can focus on therapies that help them feel safe, regulate their emotions, become more assertive, manage grief and the life transitions that may come with leaving an abuser, and dealing with depression and anxiety.”

Self-care when experiencing PTSD remains critically important. In addition to medication and psychotherapy treatment, there are simple lifestyle changes you can make to improve your chance of recovery:

Engage in regular exercise to help reduce stress.

Confide with a trusted friend or loved one

Communicate what may trigger your symptoms

Above all, go easy on yourself. Symptoms may improve gradually, not immediately, so don’t get discouraged.

If you or someone you love is experiencing domestic violence, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at [1-800-799-SAFE \(7233\)](tel:1-800-799-SAFE). If you think you or someone you love has experienced PTSD as a result of a dangerous home situation, a [Beaufort Memorial primary care provider](#) can connect you with mental health resources that can help.

January 4, 2022

BATON ROUGE

Pregnant Woman Choked, Held at Gunpoint; It Shows How Domestic Violence Rose During Holidays



Balloons are released in memory of domestic abuse victims during The Butterfly Society March Against Domestic Violence in Baton Rouge on Friday, July 14, 2017. Dozens of women and men marched down Greenwell Springs Road despite the rain to protest domestic violence and abuse against women.



A woman holds up a sign and chants during a march against domestic violence in Baton Rouge in 2017.

A day after Monrico Jones was arrested and accused of holding his pregnant girlfriend at gunpoint for hours, then choking her when she tried to escape, the woman gave birth to their son.

She ordered Jones held without bond pending another hearing this month.

"What always comes back to me about these cases, when I really have time to sit down and process everything at the end of the day — when there are children involved ... you've got to think about what you're teaching your kids," she told Jones. "Do you want them to have these kinds of relationships when they get older? I can't imagine you do."

Assistant District Attorney Kory Tauzin, meanwhile, said Jones should remain behind bars in an effort to protect the victim and their children: "The fact that you're putting your hands on a woman that close to her due date, that's pretty egregious," he said.

Prosecutors often push for higher bonds in cases where the defendant is accused of strangulation, which can indicate escalating future violence, or violation of an existing restraining order.

19th Judicial District Judge Will Jorden will again consider whether to set bond for Jones at another hearing. Maybe by the time of the hearing, the attorneys will have more information and can determine whether the victim actually wants to drop the charges, Robinson said.

With its shifting narratives, the case illustrates myriad challenges facing police, judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys tasked with responding to domestic violence cases, which increased nationwide during the pandemic.

Two pugs shot to death in domestic dispute that landed Central man in jail

One study found domestic violence incidents jumped an estimated 8% during the early months of the pandemic. Instead of relying on data from police calls, researchers reviewed 12 separate studies that incorporated emergency hotline reports, hospital records and more. They pointed to a confluence of factors likely responsible for the increase, including lockdowns and pandemic hardship, increased financial stress and issues with childcare and education.

In East Baton Rouge alone, 28 people were arrested on domestic violence counts between Christmas Eve and Dec. 29, according to a review of booking information from Parish Prison. Those cases comprise about a third of total arrests during that time frame.

"This is a bad month of a bad year," said Rev. Alexis Anderson, a local activist and Court Watch volunteer. "But Baton Rouge leaders have never been willing to acknowledge that this is a system-wide crisis, not just a law enforcement problem."

A murder-suicide left four kids motherless. It changed a sheriff's approach to domestic violence.

East Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillar Moore III said parish officials have worked hard to increase services and support for people experiencing abuse. And advocates say services are much more readily available in Baton Rouge than in neighboring rural parishes. Moore also said East Baton Rouge judges have issued more protective orders for victims, which he lauded as an important step.

He said his office expects to see an increase in domestic violence cases over the winter holidays, but this year has been worse than usual.

"Victims, however, are often reluctant to accept services," he said. "They are in a very difficult position — emotionally, financially, often with children involved. I'm sure they are often pressured not to cooperate."

Survivors may also seek to drop criminal charges after their abuser has been arrested, said Renee Craft, executive director of the Capital Area Family Justice Center in Baton Rouge, which offers counseling, support groups and other services for survivors under one roof. She said victims often become convinced that each display of violence is the last.

Physical violence often follows emotional abuse, she added. But a woman might resist getting help because "her jaw isn't broken or her arms aren't black and blue."

"Domestic violence is about control and power," Craft said. "Many times when it finally makes the news, all that other abuse has led up to a very fatal consequence."

During a year of record-breaking domestic homicides in the Baton Rouge area, the recent arrests underscore how abusive behavior can escalate. The number of arrests is likely higher than officially reported because volatile situations between intimate partners or family members are sometimes initially recorded as attempted murder or battery, not classified specifically as domestic abuse.

Even with limited data on how prevalent domestic violence actually is, a recent Louisiana legislative audit found gaping holes in the support structure for survivors and mechanisms to hold abusers accountable. The report presented a damning picture of the existing system, including scarce shelter beds and inconsistent enforcement of laws intended to protect victims.

As domestic violence soars in Louisiana, audit finds few shelters, inconsistent protections

East Baton Rouge court records show at least a dozen of the 28 defendants — close to half — had been arrested previously on similar counts or had violated protective orders, sometimes both.

Sixteen defendants saw bail set below \$10,000, while two were held without bond because they were deemed too dangerous for immediate release. Three others are scheduled for upcoming hearings mostly reserved for serious domestic violence cases — called 313 or Gwen's Law hearings, like the one that resulted in Jones being held without bond Thursday — where judges closely consider the safety of victims before setting bond.

Four defendants are accused of strangling their victims, a critical risk factor for a future homicide. [Research shows](#) that women who are non-fatally strangled are more than six times more likely to be the target of attempted murder, and more than seven times more likely to be killed by their partner.

"Most abusers do not strangle to kill — they strangle to show they *can* kill," Craft said.

Murder suspect arrested on domestic abuse after winning reduced bond, release from ankle monitor

Stephen Jackson, 27, who was already arrested multiple times in 2021 on domestic abuse battery counts, was taken into custody again the day after Christmas. Authorities say he strangled his girlfriend while they argued in the car, then began punching her in the chest and face.

Just months earlier, Jackson was arrested and accused of strangling his ex during an April argument about her family not liking him, according to police reports. The same victim told police he choked her until she lost consciousness during a prior confrontation in February, court records show.

Jackson is being held behind bars pending a 313 hearing in the most recent case, but the hearing keeps getting delayed because he's on COVID quarantine.

Of the 28 holiday weekend arrests, records show at least 10 occurred in the presence of children.

In addition to Jones, Devacee Wickem, another defendant, allegedly abused a pregnant woman.

During his 313 hearing on Thursday, Wickem pleaded unsuccessfully for his freedom after a Dec. 26 arrest.

Wickem, 32, purportedly accused his pregnant fiancée of talking to another man, pulled out a gun and threatened to kill her and himself. Six children were present during the attack — and one of them called 911, according to a police report.

When officers arrived on scene, the apartment door opened "and out came the 6 juveniles," police wrote. Then the victim ran out crying.

Police patted down Wickem and found drugs — including heroin, ecstasy and marijuana — in his pockets, according to the report. He told officers he found the heroin on his front porch "and picked it up so he could sell it and make some extra money." Police also discovered a gun in the bedroom where the attack occurred. Wickem claimed his friend had left the weapon in his vehicle, according to the report.

Before announcing her decision to hold Wickem without bond pending another upcoming hearing, Robinson scoffed at his repeated attempts to deflect blame: "It is always everybody else's fault," she said, shaking her head.

Wickem, who was released from prison in 2019 after serving a 15-year sentence for manslaughter, said his fiancée is pregnant with their fourth child. They plan to get married this month.

Those experiencing domestic abuse can contact the statewide [Louisiana Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at (888) 411-1333 or [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at (800) 799-7233.

With gun crimes and domestic violence surging, Baton Rouge DA considers reorganizing office

July 3, 2019

By James Murray

Brain Injury Common in Domestic Violence



Advocates say lasting 'invisible' injuries often go unrecognized

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Domestic violence survivors commonly suffer repeated blows to the head and **strangulation**, a trauma that has lasting effects that should be widely recognized by advocates, health care providers, law enforcement and others who are in a position to help, according to the authors of a new study.

In the first community-based study of its kind, researchers from The Ohio State University and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network found that **81 percent of women who have been abused at the hands of their partners and seek help have suffered a head injury and 83 percent have been strangled.**

The research suggests that brain injury caused by blows to the head and by oxygen deprivation are likely ongoing health issues for many domestic violence survivors. Because of poor recognition of these lasting harms, some interactions between advocates and women suffering from the effects of these unidentified injuries were likely misguided, said the authors of the study, which appears in the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*.

"One in three women in the United States has experienced intimate partner violence. **What we found leads us to believe that many people are walking around with undiagnosed brain injury, and we have to address that,**" said lead researcher Julianna Nemeth, an assistant professor of health behavior and health promotion at Ohio State.

The study included 49 survivors from Ohio and 62 staff and administrators from five agencies in the state.

Previous research has acknowledged brain injury as a product of domestic violence. But this is the first study to gather this kind of detailed information from the field. It's also the first to establish that **many survivors have likely experienced repeated head injury and oxygen deprivation – a combination that could contribute to more severe problems including memory loss, difficulty understanding, loss of motivation, nightmares, anxiety and trouble with vision and hearing,** Nemeth said.

“Nobody really knows just what this combination of injuries could mean for these women,” she said. “When we looked at our data, it was an ‘Oh my gosh’ moment. We have the information we need now to make sure that people recognize this as a major concern in caring for survivors.”

Almost half of the women in the study said they’d been hit in the head or had their head shoved into another object “too many times to remember.” More than half were choked or strangled “a few times” and one in five said that happened “too many times to remember.”

In some cases, the survivors lived through both experiences multiple times.

The reports from women in domestic violence programs throughout Ohio already have prompted changes to how the statewide advocacy group and the programs it works with are helping the survivors they serve. They’ve created a model called “CARE” for “Connect, Acknowledge, Respond and Evaluate.” They’ve adjusted their training and developed materials that address the “invisible injuries” to the brain. They’re encouraging providers at agencies to tailor care plans to the specific needs of women who’ve had a traumatic brain injury and to help them seek medical care to get an appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

Currently, the team is working on an evaluation to see how well that new programming is working. “Brain injury was not something we really talked about much until now. It wasn’t part of any routine training and we’re trying to address that now because of what we learned from these survivors,” said Rachel Ramirez, a study co-author and training director for the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. She’s been exploring ways to ensure better diagnosis and treatment for women with brain injuries and said there’s a long way to go.

“Almost all of the best-practice recommendations for TBI are focused on athletes and soldiers, and some of the guidance is impractical for our population,” she said. “These women could be having trouble being able to plan for the future, to make decisions about their safety, to come to appointments, to do their jobs. Many have likely been wondering for years what’s going on with them.”

Emily Kulow, accessibility project coordinator for the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, said that it’s likely some of the survivors who’ve suffered from severe head trauma and oxygen deprivation have been slipping through the cracks because their symptoms aren’t well-understood.

For instance, someone who can never remember to show up for counselling at the right time or who is combative with a roommate might be seen as a troublemaker when she’s really at the mercy of her brain injury, Kulow said.

“Regardless of why we’re seeing these behaviours, we should be serving all the women who have survived domestic violence and a one-size-fits-all approach won’t work.”

Added Nemeth, “The survivors who have severe brain injury are likely some of those with the greatest unmet need.”

In addition to memory problems and cognitive impairment, poor mental health may arise or be exacerbated by brain injury – and addressing the mental health needs of survivors is an ongoing challenge for agencies, Kulow said.

The researchers also authored another study, recently published in the *Journal of Family Violence*, that documents challenges that agency employees face when dealing with the complex mental health needs of survivors. The study authors, led by Ohio State Assistant Professor of Social Work Cecilia Mengo, call for care models tailored to survivors who have a mental health disability.

But they also recognize the challenges faced by advocates and survivors, particularly in areas where residents have poor access to counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists.

"It's not that they don't recognize the need for mental health services, but that need is difficult to meet in a state with inadequate mental health services," Ramirez said.

Added Kulow, "We also heard from programs that there's a lack of understanding of the more serious mental health disorders that people have, such as bipolar disorder."

The New York Times Magazine

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/01/magazine/brain-trauma-domestic-violence.html>

March 1, 2022

By Christa Hillstrom



The Hidden Epidemic of Brain Injuries From Domestic Violence

In 2017, when Becky was about to turn 40, she woke up in the middle of the night and was startled by her reflection in the bathroom mirror. Her face, gaunt from weight loss, looked pale. A scar snaked under her chin from when her boyfriend punched her. Her nostrils were now asymmetrical from when he broke her nose. Smaller scars marked her eyebrows and her bottom lip, where a tooth once cut through. She always wore her hair in a bun to mask a bald spot; he had slammed her head against a door frame, and she had needed staples there. She could barely hear from one ear.

Her chipped front tooth was harder to hide than the broken molars knocked loose during two decades of beatings. When she went shopping, she would hold items in her hands, assessing how much damage they would do to her body. She had stopped buying leather belts, the braided kind. She remembered getting some of her injuries. With others, the memories hung fuzzy and distant.

They met in 1996, when she was a teenager with a new baby. She had already spent years raising her younger siblings when her own mother, who suffered from mental illness and was a survivor of domestic abuse, could not. The first time Becky remembers her boyfriend hurting her, about six months into their relationship, was when he was joking around: a tug on her hair that was surprisingly forceful. Underneath the laughing, something felt mean. And then the meanness got darker.

From the beginning of their relationship, Becky's boyfriend drew the reins tightly around their lives. She could never predict what would set him off. Some days, he attacked her for sleeping too late; others, for waking him up too early. He hit her when the house was too messy or if he wasn't in the mood for the breakfast she made. Becky, who asked to be identified by a nickname for her safety, often showed up to work with bruises on her face, caked over with foundation, but her co-workers never said anything.

She spent whole days strategizing how to avoid his wrath: "How am I going to do all this stuff he wants me to do, so I don't get hit?" "How am I still going to go to work and maintain this job, so I don't get hit?" "How am I going to get to the grocery store and buy the things that he wants, so I don't get hit?"

Her boyfriend never touched her daughter, Nelly. But for years he controlled the child's behavior by hitting her mother in front of her. Nelly, who asked to be identified by her childhood nickname, wasn't allowed to sit on the couch or eat junk food. She never had friends over. If she didn't obey, he beat her

mom. In 2009, when Nelly was 14, she asked to live with her dad. In court, her father raised abuse as a reason to revoke custody. Still, no one reached out to help Becky. For years, she barely saw her daughter.

She had long been experiencing headaches and migraines, but by 2017, they had become so bad that she often stayed home from the clothing store she managed. The headaches swelled and subsided like a tide. In bright light, her vision became speckled. Becky began taking Percocet to blunt the near-constant pain, but over time she found herself taking the pills in anticipation of pain — a couple after work when she knew he was in a mood.

When she saw her reflection in the bathroom mirror that night, it was just hours after he had threatened to beat her with a hammer. She thought, *What am I doing?* Nelly, who was by then living in another city, was expecting her own child and would never welcome Becky into their lives if she remained with her boyfriend. Becky wanted to leave but didn't know how. There were nine security cameras surrounding the house, and the windows were screwed shut. When a door opened, her boyfriend received a notification on his phone. But if she stayed, she realized, he would probably kill her.

The next morning, after he dropped her off at the mall where she worked, Becky rushed onto a bus to a friend's house. She disassembled her phone and threw away the SIM card; she was afraid of being tracked, but more afraid of being talked into returning. She took nothing with her. She hid at her friend's house for a few days, and during a snowstorm that closed local roads, she traveled by train across high desert and mountain passes to the city where Nelly lived. She stayed for two weeks, until Nelly gave birth to her daughter, and then fled to Phoenix, where her sister lived. Becky hoped he wouldn't think to look there.

In Phoenix, finding work was difficult. The headaches had become debilitating. She wasn't being hit in the head anymore, but the pain washed over her anyway. She would wake up in the middle of the night, nauseated from it. The ache in her mouth became intolerable, too, so she finally had every molar pulled.

She was also becoming increasingly forgetful. She would walk into a room to do something and then have to backtrack — sometimes several times — to recall why she was there. She lost her train of thought midsentence. After reading passages in a book, she had to reread them almost immediately to remember what they said. It always felt as if a blank wave, a nothingness, crashed over her brain. Life had become quieter, but her mind seemed worse. "When you leave, you think it's going to be great," she says. "And then you're like, Why can't I see straight?"

Nelly noticed the forgetfulness, too. A year after Becky fled, Nelly and her baby joined her in Phoenix. At first they lived out of Nelly's car, and Becky drove her granddaughter around in the Arizona summer, air-conditioner blasting, while Nelly worked. Sometimes Becky and Nelly donated plasma — \$50 each would get them a night at a motel. There were days when only the baby ate. They would eventually save enough money to rent a place in a quiet neighborhood; when Becky told the landlord about her ex-boyfriend, he put bars on all of her windows. Having lived apart from Becky for so many years, Nelly was startled by the way her mom told the same story multiple times, not remembering that she had already shared it, and constantly lost things after stowing them in unusual places.

One night, Becky Googled "domestic violence help" and came across a public-radio story about a local neurologist who treated women whose heads had been repeatedly battered. Dr. Glynnis Zieman worked at the Barrow Neurological Institute's Concussion & Brain Injury Center in Arizona and treated professional athletes for mild traumatic brain injuries, also known as concussions. She also treated women like Becky.

As she read, Becky was grateful for finally having a way of understanding what was happening to her. But she felt a deep dread too. "It dawned on me: Holy, like I've probably been hit way more times than the average football player," she says.



An exam room at the Barrow Neurological Institute's Concussion & Brain Injury Center in Arizona. Credit...Dannielle Bowman for The New York Times

Brain injuries are like earthquakes. In a major quake like the one in San Francisco in 1906 — say, a severe brain injury involving fractures, hemorrhages or penetrating wounds — bridges go down and buildings collapse. The city is devastated. But mild brain injuries are smaller quakes: Books fall off shelves; vases are broken. It's harder to survey the damage and easy to miss what's broken, but something is clearly wrong.

The danger of mild brain injuries — an impact on or a shaking of the head that alters consciousness — grew in public awareness in the early 2000s, when neurologists began examining the brains of deceased football players and other former athletes and noticed a spike in traumatic brain injuries among military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2015, the [N.F.L. reached a settlement with thousands of players](#) for head injuries they received during games, with potential payouts that could cost the league \$1 billion in the coming years. Researchers showed that even slight blows to the head, when repeated often enough, could result in long-term neurodegenerative disease. These discoveries led to improved safeguards for athletes, including better health care and protocols for preventing and treating concussions. Head injuries had to be fully evaluated by doctors before players returned to the game, ensuring that the brain could heal without further damage, a process that sometimes takes days, weeks or months.

But even with this heightened awareness, few connected the experiences of women who endured similar or even higher levels of bodily violence to traumatic brain injuries — not even in the shelters to which they fled. “People might think, Someone smacked her in the head or pushed her, no big deal,” says Eve M. Valera, an associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard University and a leading researcher on traumatic brain injuries among survivors of domestic violence.

While brain injuries among this population have never been comprehensively tracked, data suggest that the rate might be significantly higher than those incurred by athletes or soldiers.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one in five women in the United States experience severe intimate-partner violence over the course of their lifetimes, resulting in physical injuries, most commonly to the head, neck and face. Concussions are likely to appear with alarming regularity. Every year, hundreds of concussions occur in the N.F.L.; thousands occur in the military. Valera's estimated number of annual brain injuries among survivors of domestic abuse: 1.6 million.

‘So much money goes into investigating concussions in sports. ... There’s no money to be made from studying intimate-partner abuse.’

But unlike injuries in sports, war or accidents, domestic assaults happen almost entirely out of view. Victims themselves may not be able to process or remember what happened, and their assaults are often not reported to the police. When Valera was a graduate student in psychology in the mid-1990s, she volunteered at domestic-violence shelters, where she heard stories about women whose heads were pummeled with baseball bats and work boots. *There’s no way these women aren’t sustaining traumatic brain injuries*, she thought. But when she looked for research on the impact of head injuries in women in general, she found that most research had been conducted on men. “We can’t just generalize based on what we know about males,” she says. Men and women have different hormones coursing through the brain; even the architecture of their neurons varies. When it came to domestic-violence brain injuries specifically, the literature seemed to consist of only a brief letter to the editor of *The Lancet* from a British doctor named Gareth Roberts.

In 1990, Roberts was teaching neuroanatomy at Imperial College London with one of the world’s leading groups investigating Alzheimer’s. A colleague requested his assistance evaluating the autopsy of a 76-year-old woman who died after years of abuse from her husband. The letter described rib fractures, bruises and abrasions to the head. She had a history of stroke and, it was reported, had become “demented” in her later years — mostly in the form of memory loss and confusion.

What Roberts found in her brain was similar to what he saw in brains with Alzheimer’s — tangles of tau and beta amyloid proteins associated with neurodegeneration. Her autopsy revealed a brain that had deteriorated to a degree comparable to boxers suffering from chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or C.T.E., once known as “punch-drunk syndrome.” It was the first time the literature had connected abused women with neurodegenerative disease.

Around the time Valera completed her dissertation on this topic, other studies started appearing. In 1999, researchers at SUNY Stony Brook published a study in which they examined the case records of 26 women at a shelter and found that [more than one-third of them reported head trauma](#). Most of them had been punched in the head. One had been hit with a broom handle, another stabbed in the head, another knocked out by a car door, another run over. All nine women reported symptoms like dizziness, hearing problems and blurred vision. Some developed seizures or strokes, which can surface years after strangulation. (Strangulation can inflict anoxic and hypoxic injuries, which occur when brain cells are damaged by oxygen deprivation.) Some also suffered from confusion, fatigue and memory loss.

A similar [study of domestic-abuse survivors from 2002](#) found that nearly all respondents had been knocked in the head, with 40 percent of them losing consciousness. “The frequency and severity of symptoms reported here would make it difficult to think through or cope with the complex, often formidable organizational tasks required for battered women to stop the violence, disengage from violent partners and/or establish independent lives,” the authors wrote. They recommended that anyone who worked closely with these survivors bear these difficulties in mind to help contextualize frustrating behavior and emphasized that neurological disease may not be resolved with psychosocial interventions. The next year, in another study, Valera surveyed 99 women recruited from domestic-violence shelters: Nearly 75 percent of them had sustained at least one brain injury, including from strangulation. A majority never sought medical attention.

“The connection between partner abuse and brain injuries seemed so obvious, but I was nonetheless startled by the results of my subsequent investigation,” [Valera wrote 15 years later, in 2018, in a](#)

[retrospective in The Journal of Women's Health](#), noting that there had not been as much progress as she hoped when she first discovered what she called an epidemic.

All these studies demonstrated an almost total lack of information about the problem's scope, much less how to treat it. The blind spot was catastrophic: an invisible population plagued, en masse, by invisible injuries that went untreated and unstudied for decades. "I don't think people think of a woman with a brain injury the way they would think about a quarterback on a football team," says Katherine Snedaker, the founder of the nonprofit Pink Concussions, which promotes research and advocacy for women with brain injuries. "When violence around us, on some level, is acceptable for some people, then it's going to take time." In 2017, Snedaker, along with Valera, began inviting doctors, researchers, advocates and others to share their work on domestic violence and brain injuries. The group grew to more than 300 members when pandemic-related stressors contributed to a spike in domestic assaults worldwide. Victims themselves began reaching out, too.

One woman, Freya, who is now in her 50s, called Valera in 2017 after reading an article about her work. Freya, a name she uses when speaking publicly for Pink Concussions, married her high school sweetheart, an alcoholic, after moving in with him when they were teenagers. "I'd had my head slammed into doorjambs, been strangled, thrown off a porch, had my head beaten into the ground, chased down the street with a shotgun," she told me. Years after she finally left him, she noticed she was forgetting words in the middle of sentences. She couldn't read for more than a few minutes without losing the thread. Freya had heard about the football players, but before talking to Valera, she had never made the connection. She thought she had early onset Alzheimer's in her 30s.



Freya, who thought she had early onset Alzheimer's in her 30s. Credit...Dannielle Bowman for The New York Times

When Becky walked into the lobby of Barrow's Concussion & Brain Injury Center in late 2018, she noticed that the TVs were showing football games. An autographed poster of the Phoenix Suns hung across the hall from a wide-angle shot of Arizona State's Sun Devil Stadium. Throughout the clinic were trophies, balls and jerseys signed by Grant Hill and Shaquille O'Neal. Sometimes new-patient interviews were conducted in a room with a panoramic aerial photograph of the 2015 Super Bowl to remind patients, whoever they were, that they were about to receive the same care as N.F.L. players.

Two floors beneath the concussion clinic, in an airy gym filled with therapy balls, pulley systems and foam rollers, women and other brain-injury patients worked with physical and occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists who led them through exercises that rebuild cognitive skills and physical abilities. (Roughly 95 percent of Barrow's domestic-violence patients are women.) In one room stood a boothlike machine that assessed vision, dizziness and vestibular damage while patients balanced on a swaying platform between moving walls. Many patients with traumatic brain injuries struggle with blurred or double vision, or lack depth perception, because brain injuries can disrupt neural pathways that control eye movements. Eyes that are misaligned, or that move too slowly, are at the root

of problems ranging from memory to mood; when patients are overwhelmed with visual stimuli, the eyes may not be able to keep up. Re-coordinating the eyes is often a significant step toward healing other problems.

Upstairs in the clinic, Ashley Bridwell, a social worker who conceived of the program for survivors of domestic violence in 2012, guided patients through daunting to-do lists. Many have left their abusers and are trying to rebuild their lives, which requires them to wade through the symptom-triggering paperwork of applying for Medicaid, food stamps, subsidized housing and jobs. Some are dealing with custody disputes, restraining orders or criminal prosecutions of their abusers in court. The very symptoms that could be proof of neurotraumatic abuse — scrambled stories, irritability, memory gaps — cast doubt on their credibility.

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Becky was directed to an exam room, where she met the doctor she had been reading about. Becky told Glynnis Zieman about her fatigue, the immobilizing headaches she suffered almost every morning, as well as the more severe migraines, sometimes accompanied by vomiting and emergency-room visits, that descended on her when she stood up too fast, blinked into bright light or became overstressed, or that showed up for no reason at all. Zieman examined the way Becky's eyes tracked an object moving steadily toward her and walked her through a questionnaire used to diagnose traumatic brain injury.

Before Phoenix, Becky hadn't been to a primary-care doctor in 20 years because her boyfriend would not allow it. When she finally ventured to medical clinics after she fled, her symptoms were dismissed. She was told to take ibuprofen for her migraines — her history with Percocet made doctors wary of prescribing anything stronger. Many looked skeptical when she told them how many years her boyfriend had hit her. They didn't understand how hard it had been for her to leave, that the fog she lived through felt like day-to-day survival. "When you've got somebody second-guessing you, it almost makes you feel like, God, am I crazy?" she says. She wasn't sure Zieman would find anything physically wrong with her.

Instead, Zieman told her that her brain was not functioning normally and that together they would figure out what to do. When Zieman asked how many times she had been hit in the head — five, 10, 15, more? — Becky initially thought she meant per day, not over the course of her life. "To be honest, there were some days that would have been five to 10 to 15 to 20," she says. "Every day was different."



Dr. Glynnis Zieman in her office at the Barrow center. Credit...Danielle Bowman for The New York Times

Zieman asked if she had been strangled (yes) and whether she lost consciousness (she thought so). Becky left her first appointment with a diagnosis of multiple traumatic brain injuries and a plan: Zieman recommended a range of therapies, including psychotherapy, occupational therapy and speech

cognitive therapy, and Becky and Zieman would meet regularly until they had successfully treated the headaches and migraines.

Becky had two M.R.I.s, first to check for permanent damage, which she did not have, and then to check for elevated pressure in the fluid around the brain, which she did. She also tried several medications over the course of the first year; all of them helped stem the migraines, but nothing blocked the throbbing headaches that came most mornings. Then Zieman tried Botox injections along Becky's forehead, the sides and back of her head and on her shoulders to block neurotransmitters that carry pain signals from the brain. It felt weird at first — Becky couldn't wrinkle her forehead — but she also felt immediate relief. "I woke up the next day, and then I kept waking up and waking up, and then realizing, Oh, my God, it's been two weeks since I've had a headache," she says. "It was almost instant, and it stayed." Becky continued the injections until she became pregnant in 2019.

The headaches returned during that break, but they were less frequent and easier to tolerate. The forgetfulness was still alarming, but she knew she had access to help. The calm of her new life, with entire days spent in her dimly lit, quiet apartment, had smoothed out her symptoms. But she also knew they could flare up under stress and overstimulation. On one of these occasions, last June, her baby had a bad fever, and Becky rushed her to the emergency room. There were forms and questions and grating beeps blaring from the monitors while the baby wailed on the bed. The lights above were a brash fluorescent, the worst kind for a person with a brain injury. In the emergency room, Becky felt pressure mustering behind her temples and forgot some simple words. "I need to know my ..." she trailed off for several seconds. "Choices."

Almost everything we know about concussions and neurodegenerative disease comes from studying male brains. But some of the research we do have, mostly on athletes' brains, suggests that women may be more vulnerable to concussions than men. Concussions jostle the brain's gelatinous mass of neurons, disrupting circuitry that affects mood, function, thinking and more. Men tend to have more muscular necks that better cushion acceleration of the head. There are anatomical differences between male and female axons, too. Women's axons — nerve fibers that unfurl between neurons to form communication networks — have a generally leaner architecture that could shear more easily during trauma. Successive concussions may tear them, releasing tangles of tau protein into the brain. But the differences are more than mechanical.

When Ramesh Raghupathi, a professor of neurobiology and anatomy at Drexel University College of Medicine, began studying concussions in female rats, he immediately noticed differences from those of males. The cellular changes looked similar, but functionally, the rats experienced different outcomes: The females experienced more intense anxiety and depression. "It had to do more with the circuitry and neurochemistry of the female brain compared to the male brain," he says. "You cannot discount the role of sex hormones."

In a 2014 study, researchers found that [women of childbearing age experienced worse post-concussive symptoms than postmenopausal women or women taking hormonal birth control](#), especially when the concussion occurred during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle (after ovulation, before the period begins). Progesterone levels are high during this time, and one theory is that progesterone disruption, perhaps caused by harm to the pituitary gland, could have an especially harsh impact on neurons. In other words, where a victim is in her menstrual cycle at the time of impact could have a significant effect on the outcome of her traumatic brain injury.

A study published last year analyzed [female athletes during the immediate aftermath of concussions](#). Researchers measured levels of progesterone and noted menstrual phases at the time of injury. Their results were consistent with the association of progesterone disruption and poorer outcomes, though more data is needed to understand why. (An estimated 31 to 50 percent of transgender people experience intimate-partner violence, with higher numbers for transgender women, but no studies have analyzed the impact of brain injuries in this group.)

“So much money goes into investigating concussions in sports that those protocols and papers go on to shape the way concussions in general are thought about,” says Stephen Casper, a historian of neurology at Clarkson University. “There’s no money to be made from studying intimate-partner abuse.” When it comes to chronic neurodegenerative diseases like C.T.E., even less is known about what women may face after decades of abuse. Slight acceleration or shaking of the brain that doesn’t register as a concussion may, if repeated frequently enough, trigger a cascading, dementia-like disease process that continues years after the trauma stops and is discovered only through postmortem examination.

At the VA-BU-CLF Brain Bank in Boston, the world’s first C.T.E.-focused brain repository, Ann McKee, the director, has collected around 1,250 specimens. Her findings have helped change the way football is played and has helped move hundreds of millions of dollars toward victim compensation, pushing the neurological hazards of contact sports squarely into public consciousness. But 14 years after the bank’s founding, nearly all of its specimens are still male. Female brains, McKee says, are hard to find, especially from women like Becky. “When you’ve got an interpersonal-violence situation, you have to get permission from the next of kin to get a brain donation,” she says. Domestic violence carries a shame that can be hard for families to confront, and if the next of kin is the abuser, there’s virtually no chance.

Last year, Travis Danielsen, then a medical examiner in Colorado Springs, published the first documented [examination of degenerative brain disease in a domestic-violence victim](#) in more than 30 years. In 2019, he examined the body of 29-year-old Jeanette Ellingson, who had so many injuries that he couldn’t isolate one as the cause of death. Ellingson was covered head to toe in wounds: abrasions, cuts, scrapes. Her ribs were fractured, her lungs were bruised and she had hemorrhaging underneath her skull. There were also more than 20 scars on her scalp from previous injuries. Her fiancé, Donnell Desmond Bradley, told the authorities that she fell in the shower. (He was sentenced to life in prison last year for her murder.)

Danielsen, who previously worked on C.T.E., grew suspicious when he saw those older scars. He examined Ellingson’s brain but saw no visible injuries. He submerged it in formaldehyde for two weeks, until it was firm enough to slice and stain. The immunohistochemical stain that colors tau protein helped Danielsen see the invisible: tau staining around the blood vessels in a distribution characteristic of a C.T.E.-type pathology. As a forensic-pathology fellow, he had seen this pattern many times before, including in the brain of a former college football player who committed suicide. “This case comes in on a day when I’m not assigned to do autopsies, I doubt the brain gets saved,” he says. “I know the brain would not have been evaluated for C.T.E.”

Such finds are uncommon, and not even Ellingson’s brain can be studied in a brain bank. It must be saved as evidence in case her fiancé appeals his conviction.

Before seeking treatment at Barrow, Becky, and the few doctors she had gone to, attributed her symptoms — the headaches, the shaking, the blankness — to post-traumatic stress disorder, a common, if incomplete, diagnosis. PTSD shares many nearly indistinguishable symptoms with traumatic brain injuries, and research suggests that roughly 65 percent of domestic-violence victims may experience it. But much of the research on PTSD has overlooked comorbid brain injuries. “You could treat that PTSD for a long time and not have a person who comes out functioning better, because they have a brain injury that hasn’t been recognized and diagnosed and treated,” says Danielle Eagan, a Barrow clinical neuropsychologist. Many victims have gone through years of psychotherapy only to hit a wall.

In 2015, Karen Mason had been helping women navigate PTSD as the executive director of Kelowna Women’s Shelter in British Columbia. She understood trauma. For a great many of the women who came to the shelter, abuse didn’t explode in one violent encounter — it was chronic, often beginning in childhood. She was accustomed to witnessing mood swings (irritability or antagonism) and cognitive impairments (forgetting appointments or curfews, not being able to follow rules correctly), which she and her staff associated with PTSD. But it wasn’t until Mason started dating Paul von Donkelaar, a neuroscientist then studying sports concussions, that it occurred to her that those women must also be

suffering from something else. “I thought about all the clients who might come across as oppositional or difficult and realized, What if they’re just dealing with effects of a brain injury?”

‘I felt like I’m slowly dying, and no one could figure out why.’

The following year, Mason and von Donkelaar started a research initiative, SOAR (Supporting Survivors of Abuse and Brain Injury Through Research). Part of their work draws on the expertise of survivors, including a woman in her late 30s who had recently fled from the last in a string of abusive partners: One strangled her until she managed to shove him off, then he smashed her head against a night stand; another pushed her out of a moving car, cracking her skull. Years later, she noticed unexpected shifts in her personality. She had become easily irritable with her child and had to plaster her kitchen with Post-it notes just to remember how to make breakfast. She started practicing yoga and prayed to ease symptoms but did not fully understand what was happening to her until Mason told her about brain injuries. “I’m not this monster because I get angry really fast,” she told me. “I had been so hard on myself as to why I could not do certain things.” She went on, “Everybody’s like, ‘Oh, it’s PTSD, it’s the aftermath.’” But it was more than that.

While advocates are beginning to recognize the full scope of trauma that abuse survivors are living with, little is known about how the combined presence of PTSD and traumatic brain injury might affect the brain. In January, Catherine Fortier, the deputy director of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Translational Research Center for T.B.I. and Stress Disorders (TRACTS), found [alterations in brain structure and function among abuse survivors with a history of brain injuries and PTSD](#). Notably, women whose brain injuries were sustained in the context of domestic violence displayed decreased cortical thickness and impaired function in the frontal limbic system, which may cause poor impulse control and difficulties with regulating emotions. “The T.B.I.s that occurred in those violent relationships, that occurred in a psychologically traumatic context, showed more pronounced changes than the T.B.I.s that occurred in a regular civilian-type accident, like a sports injury or motor-vehicle accident,” she says.

Researchers are also starting to grapple with the impact of multiple simultaneous injuries, which are common among abuse survivors and combat veterans. “The thinking has been that the way you study concussion is you isolate it as if it occurs in a vacuum,” says Bill Milberg, co-director of TRACTS. But what happens, for instance, when a punch in the head is followed by prolonged strangulation? (According to the C.D.C., an estimated 10 percent of all women in the United States experience strangulation, but it is often overlooked in studies and rarely screened for in emergency rooms.) Oxygen deprivation can kill neurons, yet we don’t know how that affects concussions.

Like those of PTSD, the symptoms of anoxic and hypoxic injuries often resemble traumatic brain injuries: cognitive deficits, impaired memory, mood alterations. In January, Eve Valera of Harvard published a study that measured how strangulation impacted cognitive function and found that women who had lost consciousness or become disoriented after being choked performed worse on tasks related to long-term and working memory. She also found higher levels of symptoms consistent with PTSD and depression. “This wasn’t really ever looked at before,” Valera says. And researchers still don’t know what happens when those injuries interact with traumatic brain injuries.



Paula D. Walters with a picture taken the night she was punched and strangled by her boyfriend in 2006. Credit...Dannielle Bowman for The New York Times

When Paula D. Walters founded a nonprofit in Ohio for domestic-violence education in 2015, she was unaware of the damage of combined strangulation and multiple traumatic brain injuries. She had been in an abusive relationship herself. One night in 2006, she and her boyfriend returned from a night celebrating with co-workers from the hospital where she worked as a paramedic. She remembers that they argued after he accused her of flirting. In a police report and medical records, she described how she was thrown to the ground, punched, spat on and choked. Walters was treated at the emergency room but did not receive a brain scan.

Over the years, she started noticing cognitive and behavioral problems she had never experienced: She had trouble remembering things and concentrating on her work; she was irritable and short-tempered, hypersensitive to light and noise and could no longer sleep through the night. She even lost her balance while walking, catching herself on the wall. Her symptoms, which she thought were a result of PTSD, continued to worsen, and by 2016 she could no longer work as an E.M.T. She lost her insurance and racked up tens of thousands of dollars in medical debt. She grew deeply depressed and began preparing a will, telling her family she was considering killing herself. "I felt like I'm slowly dying, and no one could figure out why," she says.

Then in 2017, struggling to focus, she rear-ended another car. This time, doctors ordered an M.R.I., which revealed an extensive die-off of brain cells as a result of her strangulation. She sought treatment at a neurology center in Minnesota, which has helped ease her symptoms, though the damaged neurons would never be fully regenerated. By 2021, Walters had testified multiple times to the Ohio Legislature in support of bills that would classify nonfatal strangulation as a stand-alone felony. (Ohio and South Carolina are the only two states without such laws.) Walters's ex-boyfriend was convicted of attempted aggravated menacing not long after the assault (he pleaded no contest) and was given probation and a \$500 fine. To this day, Walters struggles with brain fog and balance when she becomes stressed. Of her attack, she says, "I got a life sentence that night."

In September, Becky received her medical records for the first time. During the summer, she had called every hospital in her hometown to try to track them down. Someone at the first hospital she called asked whether she had ever visited the emergency room there. Becky said she thought so, and when the woman looked up her name, she sighed, "Oh, yes."

For weeks, Becky let the files sit in her inbox. "I know that those things have happened to me," she said about her injuries. "But I forgot how it happened." Finally, she opened one PDF alongside her therapist. (She let the other files sit in her patient-portal inbox until they expired and disappeared.)

That PDF included 40 pages documenting nearly a dozen visits to a single hospital, most of them related to abuse that was never identified as such. Becky went in only when she was seriously bleeding, breaking out in stress-related hives or had intolerable pain, and she always lied about how she got hurt. In 2009, she told doctors she tripped and struck her head against a wall, causing a three-inch laceration, which was actually caused by a marble ashtray her ex-boyfriend flung at her head. In 2012, she needed stitches on multiple wounds because, she claimed, someone was swinging a weed whacker around, dislodging the battery and reeling it into her face. In 2014, she told them she sustained multiple injuries from falling down the stairs when the power went out. She remembers telling another hospital that she fell while making cupcakes, her feet tangled in an electrical cord. The more details she included, she assumed, the more believable her stories would sound.

In the records, doctors observed that she was “pleasant” and “cooperative.” They believed she fully recalled what happened to her and never lost consciousness. Neither was true. “How many people in two years need to come in and get stitches in both eyes or in their lip and their chin and in their forehead, you know, before somebody is like ... Are you sure you’re OK at home?” she said. “Right there should be a sign that something is going on, you know, something is wrong.” Many hospitals have access to social workers, liaisons with law enforcement and social services and, sometimes, forensic nurses who can document injuries as evidence. In all her emergency-room visits, Becky says she was never offered those resources.

In 2020, the Government Accountability Office released a report warning that the [lack of data-gathering on traumatic brain injuries in abused women makes it impossible to confront the crisis in a meaningful way](#). Investigators identified only 12 nonfederal initiatives nationwide that provide education, screening or treatment for brain injuries in this population. Among them were law-enforcement, advocacy and health care organizations whose frontline employees are the few people victims have contact with outside their homes. In the Phoenix area, for example, the Maricopa County Collaboration on Concussions in Domestic Violence connects shelters, law enforcement and research institutions. Officers from the Tempe and Mesa Police Departments are trained to administer on-site eye-convergence tests to detect concussions and can take victims to a forensic nurse, who treats and documents criminally inflicted injuries. Jorge Lomeli, a sergeant on the Tempe Police Department’s domestic-violence unit, says the trainings taught everyone, from beat cops to detectives, that women displaying inconsistency, hostility and bewilderment aren’t necessarily being uncooperative. “It could be because they’re actually injured, that it’s not a visible injury,” he says. “You have to realize that potentially inside their head, they’re trying to tell you a story, but it’s just not coming out.”

Of the 12 nonfederal initiatives, only two provide medical care — Northside Hospital Duluth Concussion Institute in Georgia and the Barrow center in Arizona. Rachel Ramirez, the founder and director of the Center on Partner-Inflicted Brain Injury at the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, said she receives several emails a month from women who believe they have traumatic brain injuries but struggles to find the best place to send them. “There’s not the Brain Injury Doctor” to refer people to, Ramirez says. “It’s amazing work they’re doing,” she says of the Barrow center. But, she adds, it’s work that exists almost nowhere else in the country.



An occupational therapist demonstrating an eye-coordination exercise at the Barrow center. Credit...Dannielle Bowman for The New York Times

In 2019, the National Institutes of Health began funding a study using brain imaging and other tools to understand the health impacts of traumatic brain injuries on domestic-violence victims, and this year the C.D.C. plans to begin collecting data on traumatic brain injuries and strangulation through its continuing National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey.

Reviewing her medical records revealed to Becky the macro story of her abuse behind the sunny excuses she devised. “Looking at that paper just showed me how intense it was,” she says. “Imagine the things I don’t remember.” The brain-injury diagnosis helped Becky recognize a host of other physical ailments and freed her to seek help with them too. She has since been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome and herniated discs that led to spinal surgery. Her doctors believe that all of it could have stemmed from the abuse.

She recently started having dreams about her ex-boyfriend. In them, he’s always out of focus, haunting the periphery. She’s trapped there as if in a time loop, her brain frantically figuring out how to escape. Most days, she wakes up around 3 a.m. She believes that this was the hour her own mother was attacked in their home by an ex-boyfriend who broke in. Becky was only 8 when she saw her mom get struck in the head with a pistol, breaking her eardrum. Now Becky thinks her mom probably suffered multiple brain injuries herself.

Becky’s room is splashed with soft turquoise. It’s a color that feels tranquil as she brews her early morning coffee and settles upright in a spot wedged between her baby and her granddaughter. Both of them end up in her bed each night. She uses these hours to think and cry. She remembers the things that have happened to her. She cries about the pain that Nelly endured every year Becky didn’t leave.

For decades, Becky calibrated her actions to her ex-boyfriend’s frightening mood swings, conforming herself to his likes and dislikes. Awake at night now, she centers on what she’s learning to be true. She likes sour cream, which she was never allowed to eat. It’s OK to have dirty dishes in the sink. And she did what she could to be a good mother.

In January, Becky started taking classes at a community college — including psychology, behavioral health and interpersonal communications. She hopes to get an associate degree in social work. Someday, she wants to build a career out of helping other women like her. Before her traumatic brain injuries, she had excelled at school. Now she and Nelly have charted out systems and apps to help her manage her schoolwork. After she began her concussion treatment, Becky started getting tattoos. Her skin, once purpled over with bruises and crossed with stitches, is now spiraled and etched with lines she finds beautiful. On one forearm is a spidery script saying, “Never look back.” On the other, “Forever free.” On her upper arms are the names of her daughters, a lion nestled among flowers and a broken clock, frozen on the date she left.

COERCIVE CONTROL

**UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/374784000210902680/>





<https://adzlaw.com/victim-advocacy/2020/10/06/new-ca-bill-to-codify-what-victims-and-experts-know-coercive-control-is-domestic-violence/>

October 6, 2020

Posted By: Jessica Dayton

NEW CA LAW CODIFIES WHAT VICTIMS AND EXPERTS KNOW: COERCIVE CONTROL IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

On September 29, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill clarifying that conduct used to establish “coercive control” constitutes abuse under CA’s Domestic Violence Prevention Act. This is a welcome recognition of a long-established form of abuse that can be rather invisible, but no less dangerous to victim-survivors. We thank domestic violence expert Professor Nancy Lemon and all our colleagues at FVAP for their dedication in ensuring this bill reflects the most accurate evidence about coercive control.

Much of intimate partner violence is non-physical and many victims report experiencing a hostage-like situation within an abusive relationship. Experts have thus often used the non-injury model of “coercive control” to explain the dynamics of intimate partner violence. The term was first popularized in 2007 by the work of Dr. Evan Stark, who described coercive control as a pattern through which abusive partners—typically males—employ combinations of violence, intimidation, isolation, humiliation, and control to subordinate their partners. In this framework, physical violence is only one dimension of the complex interplays in an abusive relationship. Importantly, Dr. Stark argued that “what men do to women is less important than what they prevent women from doing for themselves.”

Now, the new Senate bill, [SB1141: Domestic violence: coercive control](#), passed by both houses and signed by the Governor, amends Section 6320 of the Family Code so that “disturbing the peace of the other party”—a grounds for a DV Restraining order—includes Coercive Control. The legislature has unambiguously recognized that such non-physical actions “destroy the mental or emotional calm” of victims.

Specifically, the amended statute defines coercive control as **“a pattern of behavior that in purpose or effect unreasonably interferes with a person’s free will and personal liberty.”**

The following examples of coercive control are included in amended Section 6320 of the Family Code:
(1) Isolating the other party from friends, relatives, or other sources of support.

(2) Depriving the other party of basic necessities.

(3) Controlling, regulating, or monitoring the other party’s movements, communications, daily behavior, finances, economic resources, or access to services.

(4) Compelling the other party by force, threat of force, or intimidation, including threats based on actual or suspected immigration status, to engage in conduct from which the other party has a right to abstain or to abstain from conduct in which the other party has a right to engage.

Our appellate courts have already pointedly recognized coercive control as a form of intimate partner violence. Importantly, earlier this year, *McCord v. Smith* (2020) specifically found that coercive and controlling behavior are domestic violence under California’s restraining order laws. The appellate court

noted that seemingly isolated events must be evaluated in the wider context of the relationship to determine the “totality of circumstances” for purposes of issuing a restraining order. In this case, the court notes: “The trial court found the text message was a part of an overall series of actions by McCord that threatened Smith’s peace of mind: Mr. McCord’s behavior and continually following up, visiting Ms. Smith’s house, text messaging her, sending her photographs of herself and of her nursing license, asking a fairly rhetorical question, ‘Is this yours?’ when he knew full well the nursing license was hers . . . shows that he did intend to exercise some form of dominion and control.”

We at ADZ welcome the new legislative change because it will further ensure uniformity of appropriate responses at the trial level, which is where the vast majority of victim-survivors interact with the courts. Coercive control within a relationship is harmful and violation enough; no court should question whether such control and dominion are in fact abuse. The California Legislature now thankfully agrees.



<https://www.wbrz.com/news/baton-rouge-man-allegedly-killed-wife-s-dogs-after-argument/>

December 28, 2021
BATON ROUGE, LA

Baton Rouge Man Allegedly Killed Woman's Dogs After Argument



BATON ROUGE - A man was arrested after he allegedly killed a woman's dogs because she refused to perform sex acts for him.

The man, Robert Perry III, is accused of shooting the victim's two pugs, according to the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office. The victim told deputies that Perry sent the woman's daughter a photo of her dead dog, and they later discovered both dogs shot to death at her home.

The domestic violence situation unfolding in East Baton Rouge Parish has surpassed all records. This year alone there have been 35 domestic violence related deaths. Four of those have been justified.

"We do sometimes see a correlation between animal abuse and domestic violence," District Attorney Hillar Moore said. "It's troubling. These cases that are troubling to us we will ask the courts and have a hearing to set an appropriate bond or keep the defendant in jail pending trial."

The victim told deputies that he has a history of violence, and she was involved in a domestic violence situation with Perry the night before. She said Perry was intoxicated at the time.

The next day, both of her dogs were shot using Perry's .380 caliber handgun, according to the sheriff's office.

Perry faces two counts of aggravated cruelty to animals and one count of illegal discharge of a firearm.

In another shocking case, Devacee Wickem is accused of assaulting a woman while six juveniles were inside.

"Our records show he is alleged to have committed a domestic violence offense, but shows he was convicted of manslaughter, pled guilty to that and was released from incarceration in 2019 and released from parole in 2020," Moore said.

With so much going on, discussions are already happening on how to reduce the domestic violence incidents.

"We will look at each homicide, each death and find out why this happened," Moore said. "Were there gaps in services? Why did they become a victim or defendant? Are there gaps in services that we can address to prevent the next one?"



<https://www.wbrz.com/news/judge-allows-man-accused-of-holding-woman-captive-for-3-days-to-go-home-with-no-bond-conditions/>

December 14, 2021

BATON ROUGE, LA

Judge Allows Man Accused of Holding Woman Captive for 3 Days to go Home With No Bond Conditions



BATON ROUGE- A man who was arrested days ago for domestic abuse battery and false imprisonment after **detectives said he held a woman captive for three days**, was allowed to bond out of jail with no conditions and return back to the home where the incident occurred.

The WBRZ Investigative Unit found Judge Tarvald Smith set a \$4,000 bond for Michael Graff over the weekend but did not require him to stay away from the victim or place him on a monitoring device.

Arrest records allege **Graff said he would kill the victim and threatened "suicide by cop" if police showed up.**

Graff was re-arrested Tuesday, accused of domestic violence and cyberstalking. Details on Tuesday's arrest were not immediately clear. Late Tuesday afternoon, we learned Judge Smith did sign a protective order for the victim, prohibiting Graff from going around her following the second arrest in a week.

The District Attorney's Office has also requested to have a Gwen's Law hearing to protect the victim. "For victims to be safe, judges need to consider supervision or a protective order," Domestic Violence Prosecutor Melanie Fields said. "Sometimes that's enough for them to say I'm going to follow the law and that protective order."

In this particular case, the WBRZ Investigative Unit found that was not done initially. **Michael Graff was allowed to return home after posting his bail.**

"What is concerning for the DA's office is the lack of notification before that bond was set," Fields said. "The law requires that a judge provide us with some notification to give us an opportunity to maybe say there's more the judge needs to consider. If not for the bond amount but for conditions of bond." Louisiana law states that if the court decides not to hold a hearing, it shall notify the prosecuting attorney prior to setting bail.

An employee in Judge Smith's office said they could not comment on the specifics of this case, but said they had been in contact with everyone involved.

June 18, 2018
BATON ROUGE, LA

La. Man Allegedly Killed Ex's Dog and Sent Her Photo of Body to 'Warn' Her to Break Up with Boyfriend



Patrick Langley

Woman's Ex-Boyfriend Allegedly Kills Her Dog and Sends Photo

A Louisiana man faces animal cruelty charges for allegedly fatally shooting his ex-girlfriend's dog and then sending a photo of the dead animal to her, PEOPLE confirms.

On June 8, the dog's owner, who has not been identified, told Baton Rouge police that ex-boyfriend Patrick Langley, 36, allegedly **stole the dog from her front porch**, Sgt. Dan Coppola, spokesman for the Baton Rouge Police Department, tells PEOPLE.

Langley allegedly killed the dog and then threatened to hurt her if she didn't "get rid" of her current boyfriend, according to a report from [local TV station WAFB](#), which cited the probable cause report for Langley's arrest.

A week later, on June 15, the woman contacted police and reported that Langley was allegedly calling her repeatedly, [according to local TV station WBRZ](#).

Police allege that when officers showed up at the scene, Langley contacted his ex again and admitted to killing the dog to "warn" her, the station reported.

Langley was arrested on Sunday and charged with cruelty to animals and stalking, theft and improper telephone communications, according to online court records.

Coppola tells PEOPLE: "The victim's life was threatened."

It is unclear whether he has been arraigned or entered a plea. He is currently being held in the custody of the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office.

February 13, 2015

HOUMA, LA

Boyfriend 'Strangles His Ex's Four Chihuahua Puppies and Then Beheads Her Favorite One Before Leaving the Head on Her Doorstep to Greet Her'

- Richey Kiffe and partner Suzanna Guthrie ended their relationship together
- Kiffe told Ms Guthrie to go to his house in Louisiana to collect her things
- When she got there found one of her puppies beheaded on the doorstep
- Another three of her dogs had also been strangled and stuffed into bags
- Kiffe, 52, is now facing four counts of aggravated animal cruelty



Richey Kiffe, 52, who is accused of strangling four of his ex-girlfriend's Chihuahua puppies and beheading one of them

A man has been accused of strangling four of his ex-girlfriend's Chihuahua puppies before beheading her favourite pet and leaving it on the doorstep in a drunken attack.

Richey Kiffe, 52, from Louisiana allegedly killed the pets and stuffed their corpses into a bag before hiding them behind the sofa.

He also left the body and head of the beheaded dog on the door step of his home in Houma so it would greet his former partner Suzanna Guthrie, when she went to his house.

Kiffe has now been charged with four counts of aggravated cruelty to animals

Police were called to the property on Tuesday and is being held in the Terrebonne Parish jail on a \$50,000 bond.

Police officers were called to Kiffe's house on Tuesday evening after Ms Guthrie found the bodies of her pets.

According to Houma Today, she had asked him to care for her two dogs and the puppies after breaking up with him two weeks ago.

He then asked her to go to his house to pick up the dogs after talking over how they were going to split their possessions.

She told the newspaper: 'He asked me "What do you want me to do with your stuff?"

I told him: 'My name is on that lease; I'm not going nowhere, but could you pick up my dogs please?'

'And the next thing that comes out of his mouth is: "I can't be responsible for what happens next."'

'The one that I found was the one I had named, the one he knew I wanted.'

Neighbours on the street where Kiffe lived in Houma, pictured, spoke of their shock after seeing the bodies of the dead dogs

Neighbours living near to the couple also told of their shock of seeing the body of the beheaded dog.

One neighbour, only known as Jim, told [WGNO](#): 'The head, it was clean cut, washed, everything. That's what starts off serial killers.'

If convicted with animal cruelty, Kiffe faces up to a \$25,000 fine and 10 years in prison.



<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/georgia/articles/2022-02-07/georgia-man-held-without-bond-in-killing-of-wifes-dog>

February 7, 2022
COLUMBUS, GA

Georgia Man Held Without Bond in Killing of Wife's Dog

A judge has refused to set bond for a Georgia man accused of stomping his wife's pet dachshund to death.

COLUMBUS, Ga. (AP) — A judge refused to set bond Monday for a [Georgia](#) man accused of stomping his wife's pet dachshund to death after trapping the dog in its pen in an attack partially captured on video, the Ledger-Enquirer reported.

Recorder's Court Judge Julius Hunter made the decision during a hearing for Charles Van Pelt, 26, who was jailed on a charge of felony aggravated animal cruelty.

While the dog was killed on Jan. 5, the man wasn't arrested until Saturday after a friend of his wife, Loren Van Pelt, obtained surveillance video and notified authorities.

Witnesses and police said Van Pelt drove his wife to work, kissed her goodbye and went straight home and attacked her beloved, 9-year-old pet named "Penny." Video from a neighbor's camera captured some of the attack, in which the animal was stomped and hit with a heavy glass bowl, evidence showed.

The man's wife moved out of their home and took her other three dogs with her, her family said.

Van Pelt is in medical isolation and did not attend the hearing so he wasn't able to respond to the accusations. The judge scheduled another hearing for Thursday, the newspaper reported.

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LOUISIANA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES

UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE



Louisiana's Female Homicide Rate Remains Fifth Highest in Nation

<https://lcadv.org/louisianas-female-homicide-rate-remains-fifth-highest-in-nation/>

September 30, 2021



Louisiana's rate of women murdered by men has continued its slight downward trend but remains significantly higher than the national average, according to a recent national report. The Washington, D.C. based Violence Policy Center released its annual report on female murder victims, *When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of Homicide Data*, this week. The report reviews female victims killed by male offenders in single victim/single offender incidents and ranks all states from highest rates to lowest. The 2021 report, which analyzes homicides committed in 2019, ranks Louisiana 5th in the nation. The report also reveals that Louisiana's rate of women murdered by men remains 85% higher than the national average, at 2.18 homicides per 100,000 females.

Louisiana has led the nation in female homicide rates for some time, with the rate increasing steadily from 2011-2017, then beginning to decrease with 2018 and 2019 data. Mariah Wineski, executive director of the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, is cautiously optimistic to see two consecutive years of decreasing rates. "After six straight years of increasing female homicide rates, we are certainly encouraged by any decline. However, a rate 85% higher than the national average remains incredibly concerning."

This is the 24th year that the Violence Policy Center has published *When Men Murder Women*. Because the report analyzes 2019 data, it does not address potential impacts of COVID-19 and multiple natural disasters on Louisiana's female homicide rate. The report found that 66% percent of the victims in Louisiana were killed with firearms, higher than the national rate of 58%. The report does not count multiple death incidents or incidents where the perpetrator and victim are of the same sex.

The release of the Violence Policy Center report coincides with Domestic Violence Awareness Month, which takes place each year in October. This year, advocates are holding onto hope that they are beginning to see the results of years of policy changes and efforts to prevent domestic homicides. "We are hopeful that the many changes we've made statewide to improve victim services and increase accountability for abusers are beginning to make an impact," Wineski said. Though advocates are encouraged by this reduction, the statistics remain grim for Louisiana women. "Having the fifth highest rate of women murdered indicates a clear need for more focus on this issue. Preventing these deaths should be a top priority for policymakers. If we hope to see a continued downward trend in homicide rates, our state must expand its investment in ending domestic violence."

January 3, 2022
BATON ROUGE, LA

A Baton Rouge Man's Fatal Shooting of His Girlfriend Was No Accident, Appeals Court Says



A Baton Rouge man's claim that he accidentally shot his girlfriend to death in 2014 has been rejected by an appeals court that said a balled-up, bloody sweater found near her body contained bone and bullet fragments, hair from her body, and gunpowder burn marks.

East Baton Rouge Parish prosecutors argued at Jason Allen Bringier's 2019 trial that he used the sweater to muffle the sound of the gunshot fired into the head of Lucinda Ann White, 30.

Bringier, 40 and the biological father of two of her three children, was found guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.

Baton Rouge man guilty in 2014 slaying of longtime girlfriend; boy testifies at trial

The state 1st Circuit Court of Appeal on Thursday affirmed his conviction and sentence. The case is expected to move to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

Bringier argued in his appeal that the trial judge erred in allowing a detective, who was not qualified as an expert, to give opinion testimony that blood splatter evidence was inconsistent with Bringier's explanation of how the shooting occurred.

Rather than being speculative opinion evidence, the 1st Circuit said, East Baton Rouge sheriff's detective Rob Chambers' testimony was a recitation of facts based upon his personal observation of blood splatter at the scene.

"Detective Chambers made the reasonable inference that if the victim had been standing up when the defendant shot her, as the defendant claimed, the blood splatter would have been higher up on the closet doors rather than on the bed," Circuit Judge Wayne Ray Chutz wrote.

Chutz added that the unanimous guilty verdict in the case "was surely unattributable to the challenged testimony, which was only one of many pieces of evidence that cast doubt on the defendant's theory that he accidentally shot the victim in the head while she was falling back."

Bringier initially told police that White, his longtime girlfriend, shot herself, Chutz noted. Bringier told a deputy at the scene that White went into one of her children's bedrooms to retrieve some clothing, while holding a gun, and that he heard a gunshot shortly thereafter, according to prosecutors.

One of White's children, who was 4 at the time of his mother's death, testified at the trial that he was downstairs on March 24, 2014, when he heard a noise upstairs that sounded like a "bump." Before that, he said, he had tried to go into his upstairs bedroom to watch a movie but the door was locked. That room is where his mother died.

Bringier did not testify in his own defense, but his attorney argued to the jury that Bringier accidentally shot White when she stumbled into him in one of her children's bedrooms in her Toulon Street apartment.

Baton Rouge man on trial in fatal 2014 shooting of girlfriend; murder or accident?

Prosecutors argued Bringier intentionally shot White after forcing his way into the upstairs bedroom and holding her down on a bed. White's autopsy revealed fresh injuries to her wrists, they said.

September 22, 2021

BATON ROUGE, LA

Authorities Investigating Murder-Suicide in St. Francisville

BATON ROUGE, La. (WAFB) - The community of St. Francisville is in shock after a suspected murder-suicide and a third person is recovering after getting caught in the middle of that deadly shooting.

The sheriff of West Feliciana Parish says Marshall Rayburn went to his estranged wife's home uninvited and began arguing. Investigators believe Rayburn shot Peggy Rayburn and then turned the gun on himself.

Monday night, Peggy and Marshall, who she was separated from, were found dead in Peggy's home on Ruth Street.



Marshall Rayburn (West Feliciana Parish Sheriff's Office)

District Attorney Sam DAquilla tells WAFB Marshall was released from prison on Aug. 30 on the condition he stay away from his estranged wife. Peggy had a protective order against Marshall which prohibited him from being around her and her home, DAquilla says.

The district attorney says Marshall was wearing an ankle monitor while he waited for Peggy to come outside of her house. Marshall then forced himself back into the house and murdered Peggy, DAquilla explains.

West Feliciana Parish Sheriff Brian Spillman tells the Rayburns had recently retired from a local business in the parish.

"Both of the Rayburn's were well known and well liked in the community, they worshipped at a local church and were involved in the church," Sheriff Spillman added.

Police from St. Francisville and deputies from the sheriff's office responded to the emergency call from Peggy's neighbor, Lanie Cathey, who was also shot, after trying to intervene in the couple's argument. "Miss Cathey did a great job in attempting to diffuse this situation between people that she knew that were her neighbors and had been her neighbors for quite some time, but what we ask people to do in these situations if they fear violence is going to be involved, call 911 immediately, let's get some officers on scene to help them to diffuse a possible domestic situation or whatever criminal act that could occur."

The sheriff tells WAFB deputies had received previous calls about a domestic disturbance at the Rayburn household.

The suspected murder-suicide is still under investigation so far, a motive has not been determined. The Rayburn's neighbor, Cathey, is expected to recover from her injuries.

If you or a loved one is experiencing domestic violence, contact the Butterfly Society at 225-347-7725 or thebutterflysociety@gmail.com. More information and resources is available by clicking here.

<https://www.bossiernow.com/domestic-violence-leads-to-attempted-2nd-degree-murder-charge-for-a-benton-man-bps0-says/>

January 3, 2022

BOSSIER PARISH

Domestic Violence Leads to Attempted 2nd Degree Murder Charge for A Benton Man, BPSO Says



A Benton man has been charged with attempted second degree murder following a report of domestic violence from a local hospital emergency room.

Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office detectives arrested Jose Rafael Gomez, 61, of the 100 block of Black Road, after being notified by a staff member at the Willis Knighton Bossier emergency room of a victim with a **knife wound to the neck.**

Hospital nurses told detectives that the victim said she received the injury at home at the hands of her **live-in partner.**

The emergency room staff also told detectives that the victim said Gomez **punched her in the face.** Detectives obtained and executed a search warrant on the residence where they found evidence of a struggle, a BPSO release said.



Gomez was arrested and charged with one count of Domestic Abuse Battery and one count of Second Degree Murder-Attempted. He was booked into the Bossier Maximum Security Facility with a \$160,000 bond.

This information has been provided by a law enforcement agency as public information. Persons named or shown in photographs or video as suspects in a criminal investigation, or arrested and charged with a crime, have not been convicted of any criminal offense and are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



<https://www.brproud.com/news/apso-woman-not-facing-charges-after-killing-childrens-father-in-domestic-incident/>

November 23, 2021

GONZALES, LA

APSO: Woman Not Facing Charges After Killing Children's Father in Domestic Incident



GONZALES, La. (BRPROUD) – The Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office was called to a reported shooting on Friday, November 19.

Deputies arrived at a home on Kitts Ct. around 7:30 p.m. and found a man with multiple gunshot wounds.

That man has been identified as 39-year-old Durress Wilson Jr.

Wilson Jr. died later at a local hospital.

An investigation ensued and "deputies learned that a female subject shot Wilson twice after he forced his way into her home," according to the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office,

The woman proceeded to tell deputies that the shooting victim was the father of her children.

APSO says the woman "advised deputies that Wilson entered through the front door of the residence after threatening to kill her and their children."

At some point, a chase took place between the woman and Wilson Jr.

"During the chase, the female subject who was armed with a handgun, shot Wilson in the stomach and shoulder," according to the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office.

As the investigation unfolded, detectives confirmed that the woman had "filed multiple temporary restraining orders" against Wilson, Jr. over the span of 12 years.

At the time of the shooting, there was no restraining order in place.

The shooter in this case is currently not facing charges.



https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/article_bbef0a12-a18a-11ec-ba18-27768c0867ae.html

March 11, 2022

JEFFERSON PARISH

Terrytown Man Convicted of Killing Girlfriend Following Argument

Jefferson Parish jury deliberated for just 40 minutes Thursday evening before convicting a Terrytown man of fatally shooting his girlfriend in the back of the head as she walked away from an argument, prosecutors said.

Christopher Davis, 30, was found guilty of second-degree murder in the death of Lashonda Sands.



Christopher Davis

During a three-day trial, assistant district attorneys Rachel Africk and Lindsay Truhe accused Davis of coldly killing Sands, a mother of three, whom he'd been dating for about two years. The shooting occurred early on Jan. 5, 2020 at Davis' apartment in the 1900 block of Faith Place.

Sands had received a text message about the death of a friend and was left her in tears, according to the district attorney's office. Davis became enraged when he asked Sands who died and she did not answer him. An argument over the matter turned physical, and Davis grabbed a .38-caliber pistol, authorities said.

A friend who was visiting the apartment tried to stop Davis. Sands began to walk out of the apartment door, but Davis pushed his friend aside and shot her, prosecutors said. Sands collapsed just outside the door and died there.

Davis first told investigators he was playing video games when he overheard a pop and discovered Sands injured outside the apartment, authorities said. But Sheriff's Office investigators later found the murder weapon hidden in a bucket containing children's toys, the district attorney's office said.

During trial, Davis' attorneys argued the shooting was unintentional, and that Davis had accidentally fired when his friend tried to stop him. Davis is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Nancy Miller of the 24th Judicial District Court on Monday. The mandatory punishment for a second-degree murder conviction in Louisiana is life in prison without the benefit of probation, parole or suspension of sentence. The defendant had already received a 10-year sentence from Miller on Tuesday, after he pleaded guilty to being a convicted felon in possession of a gun, the .38-caliber revolver discovered in his apartment after the killing, authorities said. Davis was barred from having guns after a 2017 conviction for domestic abuse battery. In that case, he pleaded guilty to beating his then-girlfriend, a 50-year-old woman, according to court records.



https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/article_efb061f8-6fcf-11ec-b6f8-0f96f78c0a98.html

January 7, 2022

JEFFERSON PARISH

Former Boyfriend Pleads Not Guilty in Murder of **Marrero** Mother



Lindsay Williams

A man accused of **gunning down his former girlfriend in her Marrero home as her 11-year-old son slept in a nearby bedroom** pleaded not guilty Friday in her death.

Shawn Chiasson, 27, is charged with second-degree murder, obstruction of justice and being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm, according to Jefferson Parish court records.

Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office investigators allege Chiasson **shot Lindsey Williams, 29, in the back of the head** on the morning of Aug. 14, inside her Gaudet Drive home.



Shawn Chiasson

Williams' relatives said the physical therapy assistant and mother of one had allowed Chiasson to continue living at the residence even though the two had broken up two months earlier. She wanted to give him time to get his life together, friends said.

Chiasson told detectives he'd been out all night partying when he returned to the house just before 9 a.m. on the morning of the shooting. Williams' son overheard yelling just before Chiasson ran into the boy's bedroom and took the child's phone, authorities said.

With suspect behind bars, relatives mourn Marrero mother allegedly killed by ex-boyfriend

Chiasson told the boy to stay in his room. Investigators suspect he then used the cell phone to call 911 and report the shooting, identifying himself as "Jeff" to the call taker, according to authorities. Chiasson then fled the residence.

Williams' son, who was not injured, waited several minutes before leaving his bedroom and walking out of the house, authorities said. Sheriff's Office deputies were arriving by the time he got outside.

Chiasson was arrested two days later at house on Allo Avenue in Marrero. He told detectives the gun accidentally fired while he was taking it out of his pants. But evidence at the scene did not "align" with Chiasson's explanation, the Sheriff's Office said.

In addition to the murder, Chiasson is charged with obstruction for allegedly removing evidence from the scene, including the gun used in the homicide, court records said. He was convicted of possession of heroin in March 2021 and barred from having a firearm.

After the indictment, the court raised Chiasson's bond to \$1 million. He was being held Friday at the Jefferson Parish Correctional Center in Gretna.



https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/article_ab00870c-52d5-11ec-a19b-1fe236e3e577.html

December 1, 2021

JEFFERSON PARISH

New Orleans Mother Accused of Murdering 7-Week-Old Son Gets \$300,000 Bond



Baby had skull fractures, drugs in system, doctor testifies

A Jefferson Parish judge set a \$300,000 bond for a New Orleans woman accused of killing her newborn son after a hearing Wednesday during which a forensic pathologist testified about the infant's autopsy.

The pathologist discussed the skull fractures and brain bleeds that led to the death of 7-week-old Sherwin White Jr. and revealed that the baby had lethal levels of cocaine and the synthetic opioid fentanyl in his system.



Shankia Walls

Criminal Commissioner Paul Schneider ruled there was probable cause to continue holding Shankia Walls, 28, on a charge of first-degree murder. But he set her bond at \$300,000, noting that he did not believe the evidence was strong. Walls remained at the Jefferson Parish Correctional Center in Gretna Wednesday.

Walls' attorney, Sarah Chervinsky, argued that there was no direct evidence implicating Walls and noted that Walls' autistic, 6-year-old daughter made a statement admitting to killing the infant. Walls' mother also told a state official that she saw the girl kick Sherwin.

"They rushed to judgment. They arrested my client immediately because she was the last adult in the room with the baby," Chervinsky said.

When newborn baby died, he had skull fractures, broken arm and fentanyl in system: JPSO

But Assistant Jefferson Parish District Attorney Shannon Swaim pointed out that Walls and her family's explanations of smothering changed to a kick from the 6-year-old after they were told of the baby's exact cause of death. Despite two previous interviews where she said nothing of harming her brother,

the 6-year-old's awkward confession also occurred after the family learned the extent of Sherwin's injuries, Swaim said.

Walls was arrested Oct. 4, almost two months after Sherwin was found dead in an Old Jefferson motel room where the family of three had been staying, according to authorities. Walls told Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office investigators the baby was fine when she checked on him about 3 a.m. He was sleeping next to her. on top of the blanket.

But the infant wasn't breathing when Walls woke around 11 a.m. and found him underneath the covers. Walls told investigators her daughter, who was also in the motel room, smothered the infant, according to authorities.

Metairie man told police he killed his partner after she accused him of molesting a child
Though Sherwin's only visible injury was an abrasion over his eye, the infant died of blunt force trauma to the head, according to authorities.

Dr. Ellen Connor, the forensic pathologist who performed Sherwin's autopsy for the Jefferson Parish Coroner's Office, testified via video conference Wednesday that Sherwin had skull fractures. Blood had accumulated within his scalp, on the outside of his skull, beneath his skull and around his brain. "The findings are consistent with a single blow," Connor said, though she could not rule out another blow that could have left the injuries.

Sherwin also had a broken left arm that showed no evidence of healing, meaning it may have occurred around the time of the head injury.

Rigor mortis, the stiffening of the body's muscles after death, had already begun by the time CPR was attempted, Connor said. It sets in between two to six hours after death, she explained. Based on Sherwin's injuries, Connor estimated that he would have died within 30 minutes to 12 hours after he was injured. Still, Connor said it's difficult to pinpoint a time of death because of the drugs in the baby's system.

Sherwin was born addicted to heroin and had to be treated for several weeks for withdrawal symptoms, authorities said. At the time of his death, toxicology reports show he had cocaine, fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl, methadone and phenobarbital, an anti-seizure medication, in his system, Connor testified.

"Cocaine will decrease the time for rigor to set in. It makes it set in much faster," she said. Even if Sherwin hadn't suffered the head injuries, the "presence and quantity" of drugs in his system would have caused his death, according to Connor. The amount of cocaine or the amount of fentanyl, alone, could have done it, she said. And the infant's death would still have been classified a homicide.

"The baby could not have taken the drugs on his own," Connor said.

Walls told Sheriff's Office investigators she did not breastfeed Sherwin, according to authorities.

Chervinsky told the court that Walls hadn't been lying when she initially told investigators she believed her son had been smothered. "What she's saying is what she thinks may have happened based on the information she has," Chervinsky said.

She also said there's not evidence that Walls or her family coached the 6-year-old to confess to the infant's death.

Swaim called the case a "whodunit in the hotel room." But to accept the defendant's version of events, Swaim said one would have to believe that a severely autistic 6-year-old stomped on the baby's head,

crushing his skull and breaking his arm, without the mother hearing it, and fed the infant cocaine and fentanyl.

The court, indeed, has probable cause to hold Walls, Swaim said, “when you look at the multiple stories by the defendant and what’s happened with the child, the statement by the 6-year-old, which is suspect by the way it occurred, and the history of drug use.”

Schneider ultimately agreed with the prosecution, though he set bond lower than the \$500,000 the state suggested.

July 5, 2021

LAFAYETTE, LA

Man Facing Multiple Domestic Charges Arrested Again for Shooting



A Lafayette man was arrested Sunday night on several charges, accused of shooting up a car and violating a protective order.

Court records show he's facing multiple charges for several domestic violence incidents involving women and cars.

Torian Leblanc, 24, was booked with aggravated assault, two counts aggravated criminal damage to property and violation of a protective order.

Police were called to a business in the 3100 block of Johnston Street at about 11:30 p.m. Sunday, to a report of a man shooting a gun in the parking lot. A viewer tells KATC her daughter's car was parked outside the Grand Theater and was hit by gunfire.

Leblanc remained in LPCC this morning with bond set at \$17,500 on the assault and damage to property charges; no bond has been set for the protective order violation.

Court records show that Leblanc was formally charged in a similar incident six months ago. In January, he was formally charged in a bill of information with aggravated assault with a firearm, domestic abuse aggravated assault, domestic abuse of a pregnant woman, and criminal damage to property. The pregnant person was also the victim in the domestic abuse aggravated assault, but it was a different woman who was the victim in the firearm charge, records show. The property that he's accused of damaging was a vehicle owned by the pregnant woman, records show. These incidents happened in August 2020, records show.

Around the same time that the incidents are alleged to have happened, the District Attorney obtained a protective order for the pregnant woman involved, which orders Leblanc to stay away from her. There next hearing in the case is set for August.

In March, he was formally charged with another incident in which he's accused of damaging that woman's vehicle, and with trespassing on another person's property and disturbing the peace by trying to aggravate that person. That incident happened in November 2019. There's a hearing in that case set for later this month.

In 2015, Leblanc was arrested at Cajun Field after getting into a fight and then resisting arrest. There's been no movement in that case since 2017, records show.

March 3, 2022

ORLEANS PARISH

Police: 10 Wounded in Shooting Following Mardi Gras Parade

Police say 10 people were wounded in a shooting following a Mardi Gras parade in eastern Louisiana and a man has been arrested on charges including attempted first-degree murder.

BOGALUSA, La. (AP) — Ten people were wounded in a shooting following a Mardi Gras parade in eastern Louisiana and a man has been arrested on charges including attempted first-degree murder, police said.

The Bogalusa Police Department called the Magic City Carnival Association parade on Saturday “rather peaceful” but said in a Tuesday statement that “the peacefulness would not last into the night.”

Patrolling officers heard gunshots that evening and then found that multiple people had been harmed.

An officer took two victims to an emergency room, and others were transported by ambulance or personally owned vehicles. Police said the gunshot wounds ranged from minor to serious but there were no fatalities.

Detectives determined that Less Dillon began firing from a vehicle at people in front of a store.

Bystanders shot back, and the 41-year-old was airlifted to a hospital with serious injuries.

Authorities believe the motive that led to the shooting was related to domestic violence and that most of the victims were unintended bystanders, according to the statement. Several vehicles and a storefront were also damaged by gunshots.

Dillon was booked into the Washington Parish jail on Wednesday and is being held on a \$175,000 bond, online sheriff’s office records show. It wasn’t immediately clear if he had an attorney who could comment on his behalf.

February 2, 2022

ORLEANS PARISH

Charitable New Orleans Music Teacher Is Killed in His Own Home While Trying to Keep Daughter, Grandson Safe

"We lost a bright educator," says friend Dr. Daryl Dickerson about Brian Murray. "To lose someone like this who gave so much. It hurts"



Brian Murray

A well-known Louisiana trumpet player was fatally shot in his home trying to protect his daughter and grandson.

Edmond Ramee Sr. was booked Monday on a count of second-degree murder the death of 60-year-old Brian Murray.

According to an arrest warrant affidavit obtained by PEOPLE, Murray picked up his daughter and her 1-year-old son, Edmond Ramee Jr., from a home in Gretna on Jan. 31 after she allegedly got into an argument with her son's father, Ramee Sr.

The trumpet player brought them to his home in the Little Woods section of New Orleans East. Around 3:25 p.m., Ramee Sr. appeared at Murray's house and allegedly kicked in the glass of a screen door. He then reached in, grabbed his son who was sitting nearby, and walked away.

Still carrying his son, he allegedly returned to the house with a gun and began shooting, hitting Murray, the affidavit states.

An unnamed witness hid in the closet and later escaped out a window and called 911.



Edmond Ramee Sr.

Ramee Sr. fled the area after the shooting but turned himself in Monday. He has yet to be charged or enter a plea.

News of Murray's death has devastated the New Orleans music community. Murray was a popular and skillful trumpeter who played in clubs around New Orleans. He also taught at Jefferson Parish Public Schools and Ellis Marsalis School of Music, according to his website.

Murray's website states he began playing the trump at the age of 14. He later attended Xavier University, where he received a bachelor's degree in music performance and then a master's degree in jazz studies at the University of New Orleans.

He previously recorded and performed with the likes of Aaron Neville, BB King and the O'Jays.

Dr. Daryl Dickerson, a friend of Murray's and colleague at Ellis Marsalis School of Music, tells PEOPLE that Murray was not only an outstanding musician but a great educator.

"He was a great guy and great with kids," he says. "He could relate with kids."

Dickerson recalled a day when Murray brought a group of students to a recording studio. "I can remember the smiles on those kids faces," he says. "It was that 'wow' moment in the kids' life he was giving them."

Dickerson says Murray also, through his Jerome Murray Instrumental Music Foundation, found instruments for kids in need. "He would be the guy who would get instruments from people and call me and say, do you need a trumpet, or a flute," he says. "We would turn around and give it to a student. It was a pipe line of keeping music going in New Orleans."

"He was a kind-hearted person and he would do whatever you asked him to do," adds Dickerson. "That is what hurts the most. Some kids won't get to experience what he was offering. He was the kind of person, his knowledge, his wisdom, his experience, he would give it all to you so you would understand what is going on."

"It is going to be a great loss to his students," he says. "This is something you can't replicate what he brought to the table and the type of person he was."

Dickerson says he is still trying to process his friend's death.

"I am still trying to figure out why this guy," he says. "The innocent always seem to get hurt the most. He was not a confrontational type of person. I think America has to take a look in the mirror and ask themselves about the guns we have on the streets and how we are getting younger and younger people using these guns and ruining people's lives. We lost a bright educator. To lose someone like this who gave so much. It hurts. We just lost one of the captains of the ship."

February 22, 2022

ORLEANS PARISH

Man Booked with Attempted Murder After Shooting Woman in Head, NOPD Says



Rafael Rojas

NEW ORLEANS (WVUE) - A man was arrested on allegations of attempted murder Monday night (Feb. 21) after he allegedly shot a woman in the head during a domestic dispute in the Central Business District, New Orleans police said.

Rafael Rojas, 45, was booked into the Orleans Justice Center jail on allegations of attempted second-degree murder and domestic abuse battery, according to jail records. Rojas was awaiting his first appearance Tuesday in Orleans Parish Magistrate Court to determine whether bond would be set and in what amount.

According to police, a 44-year-old woman was arguing with Rojas just before 8 p.m. at a location in the 300 block of Magazine Street. She said she left the room, but later returned and was physically assaulted by Rojas. She told police she then heard a "pop" sound and realized she had been shot by the man.

The NOPD said officers arrived and found the woman suffering from an apparent gunshot wound to the head. She was taken for hospital treatment by New Orleans EMS personnel and her condition has not been updated by authorities.

Police said Rojas was identified as the gunman and apprehended "within moments after the offense."



https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/article_54703ca4-6c2d-11ec-8aef-3f3bffcfa26c.html

January 2, 2022
ORLEANS PARISH

Father Arrested After His 1-Year-Old Child Was Shot New Year's Day, New Orleans Police Says



Police investigate the scene of a 1-year-old's shooting at Decatur and Spain streets on Jan. 1, 2022.

The father of the infant shot multiple times on New Year's Day has been arrested in connection with the shooting, New Orleans police said Sunday.

The 1-year-old was shot multiple times in the Marigny neighborhood at around 2 p.m. on Saturday and was taken to the hospital in a private vehicle. In the hours that followed, police identified Corey Davis, 27, as a person of interest and made the arrest on Sunday.

Davis was booked on charges of first-degree attempted murder, second-degree cruelty to a juvenile, domestic abuse, aggravated assault, aggravated criminal damage to property, felon in possession of a firearm, illegal use of a weapon, and theft of a motor vehicle.



Corey Davis

Police said the child was shot at the intersection of Decatur and Spain streets and is still at the hospital, though authorities have not released any information about the child's condition. No other details were available Sunday.

New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Shaun Ferguson described the shooting as a tragic and senseless violent crime.

"As I've said before, practicing self-responsibility and implementing proper conflict resolution skills can help to avoid tragic situations like this," Ferguson said.

New Orleans police asked that if anyone has additional information on this crime, they contact the NOPD Child Abuse Unit detectives at 504-658-5267.

<https://people.com/crime/jury-says-la-woman-murdered-estranged-husband-outside-walmart-during-custody-fight-over-daughter/>

February 01, 2022

RAPIDES PARISH

Jury Rules La. Woman Murdered Estranged Husband Outside Walmart During Custody Exchange of 2-Year-Old Daughter



Kayla Giles

Kayla Giles and her husband, Thomas Coutee, Jr., were embroiled in a contentious divorce and custody battle when she shot him in 2018

RAPIDES PARISH SHERIFF'S OFFICE

On Sept. 8, 2018, Kayla Giles met her estranged husband at a Walmart parking lot so he could take her two daughters from a previous relationship to a birthday party for the couple's 2-year-old daughter.

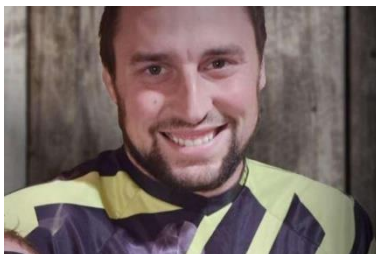
But Giles shot him in what she said was self-defense, a claim that a jury in Rapides Parish, Louisiana, rejected in a recent verdict.

On Saturday, Giles's 35th birthday, the mother of three was found guilty of second-degree murder and obstruction of justice for the shooting death of her estranged husband, Thomas Coutee Jr., in Alexandria, court records show.

Second-degree murder in Louisiana carries an automatic life sentence, and obstruction of justice carries a sentence of up to 40 years in prison.

Giles is scheduled to be sentenced on March 28.

Standing outside of the courtroom and choking back tears, Coutee Jr.'s mother, Cathy Pearson, said, "My baby got the justice he deserved," KALB reported. "She'll never be able to hurt anybody else."



Thomas Coutee Jr.

At the time of the deadly shooting, Giles, then 31, and Coutee Jr., 30, were embroiled in a contentious divorce and custody battle over their daughter, who turned two on the day of the shooting, [Alexandria Town Talk](#) reported.

The couple separated in February 2018 after nearly four years of marriage. Giles had two daughters from a previous relationship when she married Coutee Jr.

On Aug. 20, 2018, a judge awarded the couple shared custody of their daughter.

Eight days later, Coutee asked for a new trial in the custody fight, claiming Giles had been abusive in the past by slapping him during a custody exchange in May, KALB reported.

On Sept. 7, 2018, just one day before the shooting, Giles was served papers ordering her to appear in civil court to reconsider the custody arrangement, [Alexandria Town Talk](#) reported. Coutee Jr. wanted sole custody of their daughter.

"This defendant was not going to let that happen," Louisiana Assistant Attorney General Joseph LeBeau said during opening arguments, [Alexandria Town Talk](#) reported.

On the day of the shooting, Coutee Jr. asked Giles to meet him to pick up her daughters so they could attend a birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese he planned for the couple's daughter. He wanted to meet at the police station, but Giles suggested they meet at the Walmart parking lot, which she could see from her condo.

LeBeau said Giles came to the parking lot armed with a gun planning to kill Coutee Jr., [KSLA News 12](#) reported.

"Kayla put a bullet through that heart," LeBeau told the jury.

Giles' attorney, George Higgins III, told jurors that his client hadn't plotted to kill her estranged husband, but acted in self-defense.

As a U.S. Army veteran, Giles' attorney argued she learned to always be prepared and brought a gun with her because she was concerned about threats from her estranged husband, [Alexandria Town Talk](#) reported.

Coutee Jr. was leaning into Giles vehicle when she shot him, Higgins told the jury. He had also opened the door of her vehicle.

Higgins went on to argue that evidence for Giles' self-defense claim "is as clear as a bell," KALB reported, especially since someone planning a murder "wouldn't do it at high noon in the Walmart parking lot."

LeBeau argued that shooting someone for opening a car door "was not justifiable" since it was not unlawful or forceable entry, KALB reported.

During the trial, Giles's oldest daughter, who witnessed the incident, testified that she never saw Coutee Jr. "lunge" at the car, KALB reported.

While leaving the courthouse, Coutee Jr.'s father had a message for his daughter-in-law, KALB reported: "Happy Birthday, Kayla."

Higgins told KALB he will appeal.

"There's just no law about this Stand Your Ground, it's relatively new," he told KALB. "It's the first in-vehicle Stand Your Ground case that we saw. So, (the verdict) doesn't surprise me at all."



<https://www.wafb.com/2021/11/04/woman-finds-3-shot-killed-including-child-louisiana-home/>

November 4, 2021

SHREVEPORT, LA

Woman Finds 3 Shot and Killed, Including Child, in Louisiana Home

SHREVEPORT, La. (KSLA/Gray News) - A woman came upon the grim discovery of three bodies inside a home in the early hours of Thursday.

Dispatchers first got the call just before 2 a.m., [KSLA reported](#).

Police said a mother of one of the residents checked the back door to the building. That's when, police say, she discovered the bodies of two males and a female, all shot to death.

One of the victims was a 12-year-old boy.



Barry Rigsby (SPD)

Police identified Barry Rigsby, 36, as a suspect in connection to the triple homicide. He faces three charges of second-degree murder.

A manhunt is underway at this time, and law enforcement officers are asking for Rigsby to turn himself in immediately.

Shreveport Police detectives on the scene believe the incident is domestic in nature. The nature of the deaths is currently unknown.

"Right now, we developed a suspect (profile) that we put out a BOLO on," said Cpt. Jerry Oglee. "Driving a possibly burgundy 2016 Dodge Journey, and that's who we're looking for."

The officer added that the suspect has a violent criminal history and is considered armed and dangerous.

Police are not sure if the suspect is still in the area or is traveling south.

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<https://www.klfy.com/louisiana/tpso-louisiana-man-uses-saw-to-cut-his-way-through-estranged-daughters-bedroom-to-choke-and-beat-her/>

June 8, 2021

TERREBONNE PARISH

TPSO: Louisiana Man Uses Saw to Cut His Way Through Estranged Daughter's Bedroom to Choke and Beat Her



Terrebonne Parish, La. (KLFY) A Chauvin man who sheriff deputies say strangled his daughter, whom he had not seen in over five years, has been arrested on multiple charges including false imprisonment and domestic abuse by strangulation on a minor.

According to the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office, 40-year-old Donnie Neil admitted using heroin and meth in the presence of the child when the incident happened in the 200 block of Sunny Acres Street. The child, who deputies say, came from out of town to visit her father, ran into a bedroom and locked the door following an argument with Neil about his drug use.

Deputies say Neil became angry and punched the door multiple times before grabbing a saw and sawing his way through the door.

After making entry, Neil allegedly hit the female minor in her face several times and choked her to nearly unconsciousness while banging her head on the floor, deputies said.

When he let her go she ran to a nearby home and called authorities.

On arrival, deputies say, they made contact with the child who had obvious injuries around her neck and face; a search warrant found drug paraphernalia and shotgun shells and the child's personal belongings, which were returned to her.

After a short while, deputies say, Neil was located hiding inside of his neighbor's residence and transported to the Sheriff's Office for questioning where he admitted to hitting the child for "supposedly being disrespectful."

He was arrested and charged with domestic abuse battery, illegal use of a controlled drug in the presence of a person under 17 years old, false imprisonment, possession of drug paraphernalia and aggravated assault.

His bond was set at \$51k.



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

WESTERN DISTRICT *of* LOUISIANA

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdla/pr/many-louisiana-man-convicted-kidnapping-and-interstate-domestic-violence>

MANY, LOUISIANA

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Western District of Louisiana

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Many, Louisiana Man Convicted of Kidnapping and Interstate Domestic Violence

SHREVEPORT, La. – A federal jury returned a guilty verdict today against **Dillon James Merritt**, 54, of Many, Louisiana, charging him with kidnapping, interstate domestic violence and possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine, Acting United States Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook announced. United States District Judge Donald E. Walter presided over the trial.

Evidence introduced at trial this week revealed that on December 12, 2017, Merritt kidnapped a woman in Natchitoches, Louisiana, and took her across state lines to Texas and held her against her will from December 12, 2017 through December 16, 2017. Testimony at trial showed that Merritt and the woman (victim) briefly dated in the fall of 2017, but after Merritt punched the victim in the stomach following an argument, the victim severed the relationship with Merritt. Following the breakup, he continually called the victim and harassed her.

During the evening hours of December 12, 2017, Merritt found the victim walking back home from visiting with a friend near the Walmart parking lot in Natchitoches and struck her in the head and put her in a truck and left. The victim was bound and gagged and hidden under clothing in the vehicle and for the next several days, was taken by Merritt to various locations in Louisiana and remote locations in Texas near Toledo Bend. Merritt repeatedly raped the victim, doused her with lighter fluid and tried to set her on fire, and severely beat her with his fists, elbows, feet and with a Maglite flashlight over this four-day period causing serious bodily injury to the victim. In addition to the brutal beatings, aggravated sexual assault, and sexual abuse on the victim committed by Merritt, he possessed with the intent to distribute 5 grams or more of methamphetamine.

“The severe brutality and sexual abuse inflicted by this defendant on the victim was pure evil,” stated Acting United States Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook. “No one deserves to be treated in this manner and justice has prevailed today.”

Merritt faces up to life in prison for the kidnapping charge, life for the interstate domestic violence charges, a maximum of 40 years for the drug charge, and up to a \$250,000 fine. **Sentencing is set for November 11, 2021 at 11:00.**

The FBI and Sabine County Sheriff's Office in Hemphill, Texas conducted the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Cadesby B. Cooper prosecuted the case.

#



<https://www.wafb.com/2021/02/20/district-attorney-says-suspect-zachary-homicide-had-restraining-orders-place-against-him-long-history-domestic-abuse-battery-charges/>

February 19, 2021

ZACHARY, LA

District Attorney Says Suspect in Zachary Homicide Had Restraining Orders in Place Against Him, Long History of Domestic Abuse Battery Charges

Zachary Domestic Violence

BATON ROUGE, La. (WAFB) - Two restraining orders didn't stop one man from allegedly killing Kylan Givens in Zachary on February 7.



Zachary police say the suspect is 34-year-old Jeffery Neff. (WAFB)

He's been on the run for almost two weeks.

Authorities are calling this a **domestic violence related shooting**, and now they need your help tracking down the suspect.

"You never know who's hurt in that relationship. It's very difficult, and just like that we've lost him (Givens)," said Stacey Atkins, aunt of Kylan Givens.

Givens' aunt and uncle are still in shock following his passing.

"He was very hesitant about going there that night, not sure about what conversation inspired, but he ended up going after some hesitations," said Atkins.

WAFB has learned more about the case. As East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney Hillar Moore says the conflict that led to the shooting, may have involved a woman who knew Givens and the suspect, Jeffery Neff.

As records show **she had recently filed two different type of protective orders against Neff.**

The victim's family says Givens was just an innocent bystander.



WAFB has learned more about the case. As East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney Hillar Moore says the conflict that led to the shooting, may have involved a woman who knew Givens and the suspect, Jeffery Neff. (WAFB)

"Kylan was in a relationship with this lady. And un-announced to him, he was invited to her home from what we understand. And after he showed up, the gunman showed up right behind him and shot him on the passenger side," said Atkins.

District Attorney Moore says that Jeffery Neff was convicted of domestic abuse battery in 2018. Then last month (January 2021) police arrested Neff on another domestic abuse battery related offense. He was released on a \$10,000 bond and the restraining orders were filed shortly after.

"What do you do? Everybody's entitled to a bond, everybody's presumed innocent, despite history. So, it's difficult choices that everyone has to make. But everything was in place, that should've been in place. But it was the alleged actions by someone who didn't want to abide by the rules or the laws," said Moore.

Moore says while a protective order is essentially just a piece of paper, it is an important step for his office and for authorities.

"Obviously it doesn't stop a bullet. But someone who wants to do something horrible and bad, that piece of paper doesn't stop it. But it gives the police different circumstances, the ability to arrest someone, pick somebody up quickly. It gives them notice that this person has this in place, you can arrest him, you don't have to call, you don't have to fine," said Moore.

"Because this is happening too often in our city," said Twahna Harris with The Butterfly Society. Domestic violence advocates like Twahna Harris say it's not always the person that files a restraining order that can be impacted, but others as well, like Givens in this case.

"So, we have to be more aware of what's going on with family members and friends and being alert. And knowing that this can happen to anyone at any given time, and this situation here is a very tragic situation, it's very heartbreaking," said Harris.

"If we just would of known, or like O said, if you know something, say something. Do something," said Atkins.

The 24-hour Domestic Violence Crisis Line is (225) 389-3001.

If you know where Jeffery Neff may be, contact Crimestoppers or Zachary Police.

Estranged Husband Wanted in Zachary Homicide Just Weeks After Judge Issued Restraining Order



The latest in a string of recent homicides plaguing the Zachary community came after months of escalating threats the suspect made against his estranged wife, culminating in a shooting that left another man dead outside her home.

Domestic violence killings across East Baton Rouge Parish have reached a historic high amid the coronavirus pandemic, and the killing Saturday morning again raises questions about what can be done to prevent tragic outcomes.

Zachary Police Chief David McDavid said the abuse victim in this case did everything she could but the system failed her — and by extension failed to protect the man who was killed.

"A restraining order is just a piece of paper. We've got to put some teeth on these cases," he said. "Are we really keeping the public safe? That's the thing you have to ask yourself."

Zachary police identified the suspect as Jeffery Neff, 34, who, in a restraining order issued just weeks ago, was explicitly forbidden from going within 100 yards of the property where the shooting occurred — the house where he had lived with his wife and children until their separation and his recent escalating abuse, court records show.

The victim was identified as Kylan Givens, 32, who was in a relationship with the woman who obtained a restraining order against Neff, according to a source with knowledge of the situation.

Neff remained at large Monday afternoon after fleeing the scene and officers are actively searching for him, police said. The shooting was reported around 5 a.m. Saturday in the 4100 block of Hidden Pass Drive in Zachary, marking the city's third homicide of 2021 and adding to an unusual spike in gun violence for the otherwise relatively peaceful community.

[A 'brutal' year for Baton Rouge women: Domestic violence deaths in 2020 surpass 10-year record](#)

The Zachary police chief said authorities were aware of past calls for service about domestic disputes involving the couple.

In her application for protection from abuse filed last month in East Baton Rouge District Court, the estranged wife described in harrowing detail two recent incidents when Neff threatened her life and terrorized their children and other relatives.

She submitted the application Jan. 22, the day after Neff came home drunk and confronted the woman and accused her of cheating, according to her account. When her child asked why he had a gun, he replied: "Because they will be carrying her out in a body bag if anyone calls the police on me tonight," the woman wrote in the application.

"Jeffery has cheated and abused me from the beginning of the relationship," she wrote. "I just want it to be over."

She said the night of the confrontation, his mother and other family members came over to calm him down, but to no avail. At one point, he put on brass knuckles and she called 911 six times with no answer, according to the application.

"Jeffery kicked my truck and I put the truck in reverse and he cocked the gun," she wrote, saying he then told his relatives "he was gonna empty the clip in my ass today." The police arrived shortly thereafter, and he hid the gun to talk to officers, according to the application.

Records show Neff was booked into East Baton Rouge jail hours later on domestic aggravated assault, then released on \$10,000 bond. The conditions of his bond included issuance of the protective order, but did not impose additional restrictions such as an ankle monitor or curfew.

East Baton Rouge marks deadliest month in over a decade as murder rate surges into 2021

In her request for protection, the woman described another incident in November when Neff started kicking her car while she and her children were inside, demanding to know where she had been. She drove to the police station and he followed her, then told her, "I got you" but didn't elaborate, according to her account.

Neff also has past domestic abuse arrests spanning several years. He pleaded guilty in 2018 to domestic abuse battery, court records show.

McDavid said various players in the local criminal justice system should have some serious discussions about using technology to help protect victims of abuse. He suggested more advanced ankle monitors or alarm systems that would immediately alert law enforcement when an abuser violates a restraining order. Of course, funding for such technology would be an issue for officials to figure out.

East Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillar Moore III said his office is in the process of rolling out a Stop the Loss program that involves local law enforcement agencies reviewing domestic abuse arrests immediately after they occur and notifying prosecutors about possible red flags the judge should consider when setting bail. Moore said that program is underway with the Baton Rouge Police Department and East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office, and officials hope to expand it to Zachary, Baker and Central police soon.

Domestic violence homicides have been on the rise for months, a trend experts have attributed largely to the pandemic and resulting upheaval of normal life and significant financial pressures. Lockdown orders and social distancing guidelines also mean abuse victims are more isolated or sometimes trapped at home with their abusers.

Another recent homicide in Zachary involved a woman's adult son fatally shooting her boyfriend during an argument.

MURDERED & ORPHANED CHILDREN

**UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**

Preble County Sheriff: Deaths of Father, 2 Children Believed to be Murder-Suicide



All three suffered gunshots, and a handgun was found at the scene, sheriff says.

The deaths of two children and their father at a Preble County home is being investigated as a murder-suicide, Preble County Sheriff Mike Simpson said.

Shane Elliott, 40, and his children, Caleb Elliott, 13, and Grace Elliott, 10, were found dead Monday by deputies after the children's mother called 911 to check on them at the house in the 9200 block of Greenbush Road in Gratis Twp.

All three suffered gunshot wounds and were found in the living room, Simpson said. There was no sign of a struggle, he said. A handgun was found at the scene and it appears the father shot his children and then killed himself.

The bodies were taken to the Montgomery County Coroner's Office, where autopsies were expected to be performed Tuesday. Simpson declined to say how many times or where on their bodies the trio had been shot.

Kellie Elliott called the sheriff's office Monday morning when Shane Elliott failed to drop off the children at Preble Shawnee High School after a weekend visit. Kellie Elliott filed for divorce in 2020, but it was not yet final, according to the Preble County Clerk of Courts records.

In the call, Kellie Elliott said Shane Elliott was scheduled to meet her for a parenting exchange at 7 a.m. but he did not show up. Simpson said he also did not report for work at Weber's Body and Frame in West Alexandria.

When Kellie Elliott checked the Greenbush Road house, she found the car in the driveway, but no signs of people.

"I have been out here honking," she told a dispatcher about 10:30 a.m. She said she did not want to knock on the door because of "high conflict and a domestic violence situation, and I don't want to be knocking on the door."

Calls were not returned from her children or Shane Elliott, she said.

"There is no movement of curtains or blinds. I have been out here for five minutes honking and there is nothing going on inside," Kellie Elliott told the dispatcher in a call obtained by this news outlet. Deputies arrived and forced entry into the house.

FIRST REPORT: Man, 2 children found dead inside Preble County home

A Facebook post by Shane Elliott published on his page at 1:18 a.m. Monday seemed to voice his frustration with the divorce process.

"Equality in parenting should never have to spend multiple years in court ... I thought the system would help my kids but I was wrong," Shane Elliott said in part in his post.

Simpson said the deaths happened overnight, but he could not specify whether it was in the early morning hours after Shane Elliott's post was made.

Kellie Elliott told this news outlet via message that she and Shane Elliott had many years of turmoil. She said she fought the courts "to get my children, but all they would say is 'you went back' so how can we take the kids? No one would do an investigation on him."

A contested final hearing in the divorce before a magistrate was scheduled for Dec. 21, but continued until March, according to court records. The Elliotts also filed for divorce in 2015, but it was dismissed. A letter sent by the Preble Shawnee Local School District to families of students said the children died as a result of "a tragic event."

One of the Elliott children was a fourth-grader at Preble Shawnee Elementary. The other was a seventh-grader at Preble Shawnee Middle School.

"At this time we do not have any information to share about the situation," Superintendent Todd Bowling stated in the letter.

Grief counselors were available Tuesday for students in the district.

"Preble Shawnee is a small but supportive community. Both students were well known and liked by fellow students and staff. This is a tough time for our Arrow family, but we will be supportive of the family, our students, and staff as needed," Bowling told this news outlet.

Joshua Pergram, who lives nearby, stopped by the house Monday evening with his two daughters to place a memorial with teddy bears, sports balls, candles and flowers.

"We brought it out here to get it started because we know how this community is. It is going to affect the whole community. One of the boys was in football so we brought a football," Pergram said. "We have a good community and school. The teachers are awesome out here. One of the kids said they noticed that some of the teachers were crying. It is going to affect everyone," he said.

December 13, 2000
CLEVELAND, TN

FATHER, CHILDREN KILLED: 'Pay Back' For Mom Ends in Deaths

CLEVELAND, Tenn. (AP) - Sheriff's deputies shot and killed a Marine Corps recruiter after he apparently stabbed his young son and daughter to death and set the house on fire.

Tracy Thacker, 39, took the two children, a 5-year-old Parson and 9-year-old Maylyn, out of Michigan Avenue Elementary on Tuesday morning. On the sign-out sheet under "reason," he wrote "to pay back mom."

Thacker and his wife, Holli, were separated and planning to divorce, authorities said.

Bob Taylor, Bradley County schools superintendent, said Thacker had the right to take his children from school. He said the ominous notation on the sign-out log was noticed too late.

"It raised a red flag, and the school contacted the county administration office," Taylor said. By then, authorities had reached the Thacker home.

"We're trying to piece together all the events leading up to this - what happened this morning, last night and the day before," Bradley County Sheriff's Department spokesman Chip Bryant said.

About 10 a.m., Thacker's 18-year-old stepdaughter called police from a neighbor's house. Bryant wouldn't disclose details of the call, but said Thacker told the young woman - his wife's daughter from a previous marriage - she "better get out" of the house.

As deputies tried to negotiate with the knife-wielding Thacker, they noticed smoke, Bryant said. One officer tried to get in through a side door, was forced back by the smoke and then confronted by Thacker.

"I heard someone yell, 'What do you think you're doing here?' and then two gun shots," said Dean Johnson, a neighbor who lives within sight of the rural Thacker home, about 50 miles northeast of Chattanooga.

The deputy fired at least one shot, killing Thacker. Bryant did not release the deputy's name or say where Thacker was hit by gunfire.

"There's no reason to believe the deputy acted improperly," Bryant said. The officer was placed on administrative leave with pay until an investigation is complete.

Firefighters put out the fire and discovered the children's bodies.

Deputies arrested Thacker in May after his wife said he tried to break her neck for refusing him sex. When her lip began to bleed, she said, Thacker stopped the attack and apologized.

The wife called the sheriff, nevertheless, and told deputies that she would seek a court order to keep Thacker away from her and the children and that she would seek a divorce. Authorities went to the home again on a domestic violence complaint Oct. 1, but Bryant said no police report was filed.

Holli Thacker, who is staying with friends in Cleveland, could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Johnson said the Thacker family had lived in the home about two years, but their two families did not know one another.

"They never came out of the house that much," Johnson said. "I'd see the kids playing now and then, but that's about it. Everyone else knows each other, but they kept to themselves."

<https://www.cleveland.com/news/2022/01/mother-of-9-month-old-filed-several-complaints-against-childs-father-before-murder-suicide-in-brook-park.html>

January 13, 2022

BROOK PARK, OH

Mother of 9-Month Old Filed Several Complaints Against Child's Father Before Murder-Suicide in Brook Park



Sarah Smith-Carter holds her daughter Alice Porter. Alice was fatally shot by her father, Martin Porter, before he shot and killed himself Saturday in Brook Park, police said.

BROOK PARK, Ohio -- A Brook Park mother left heartbroken by the killing of her 9-month-old daughter said the girl's father had been harassing her for months, including just days before the murder-suicide.

Sarah Smith-Carter said in an interview with [cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com) and The Plain Dealer that she filed a pair of complaints against Martin Porter, both for telecommunications harassment, on Jan. 3 and Jan. 8.

A short time after she filed the second complaint, Porter kicked in the door at Carter's home and shot her in the leg. He then fatally shot their daughter, Alice Porter, before he shot and killed himself, police said.

Porter came to the Brook Park Police Department earlier this month to be served the first harassment complaint, but he died before he could be served the second, police confirmed.

Carter and her 6-year-old daughter Sienna are devastated by Alice's death, she said. Alice was named after Carter's great-grandmother, who died almost four years ago.

"I know that Alice is being cared for her by great-great-grandmother," Carter said. "I know she's watching over her, and that keeps me sane."

Alice never stopped smiling, was always happy and barely cried, her mother said.

When Porter shot Carter, the gunshot shattered her femur. She needed a rod and screws inserted into her leg to repair the damage, she said.

"They basically had to reconstruct my femur," Carter said. "I have nerve damage in my foot, but with time and some physical therapy, I'll regain control."

Sienna and two other children were hiding under a bed during the deadly shooting. Carter believes Porter may have shot Sienna if he found the children hiding.

"I'm just glad they were under the bed and didn't see him shoot me," Carter said. "That would've been more traumatizing for them."

Brook Park officers had been to Carter's home on West 150th Street south of Elm Avenue several times before the murder-suicide, according to police reports. On Aug. 15, they responded to a call about a broken cellphone. On Oct. 24, Carter reported that Porter had been harassing her and showing up at her home without permission.

Porter and Carter dated for two years, but they separated about one month before Alice was born March 11, 2021. Carter said she ended the relationship after a domestic dispute while she was pregnant.

Carter worried about Porter's mental health because he would sometimes have loud outbursts. She recommended to his family that his guns be taken away from him until he could be evaluated, she said. But Porter and his family dismissed her concerns, she said.

"I didn't really see this coming, but I had a feeling he would harm himself, if not Alice," Carter said. When Alice was born, Carter initially allowed Porter to see his daughter at his own discretion. But it didn't work out because Porter would never leave Carter's home when she asked him to leave. Carter instead began bringing Alice to meet Porter in public.

Carter said Porter spent months harassing her through email, and she sought to obtain a protection order against him. But she was unable to obtain one at that time, because he had not threatened to harm her, she said.

Carter said Brook Park police officers did help her by offering tools and guidance for dealing with Carter, including teaching her how to block his phone calls. They also warned Porter to stay away from Carter's home, and issued him a trespass warning to keep him away from her property, Carter said.

However, Carter wants to speak out about how difficult it can sometimes be to obtain a protection order, even in cases where someone might feel they are in serious danger.

"I just want to bring attention to the fact that there are people that are very manipulative and know how to threaten you legally," Carter said. "And there should be a way for people, not just women, to be able to be protected when they feel that their life is in danger."

Carter set up a [GoFundMe](#) page for donations to support Sienna and herself in the wake of Alice's death. It raised more than \$16,000 toward its \$30,000 goal by Wednesday afternoon.



Alice Porter was 9-months when she was fatally shot by her father in her Brook Park home on January 8, 2022.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/apr/07/john-edwards-inquest-series-of-critical-errors-allowed-man-to-his-children-nsw-coroner-finds>

April 7, 2021
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Murders of Jack and Jennifer Edwards by Estranged Father 'Were Preventable', NSW Coroner Rules

Teresa O'Sullivan points to a litany of errors made by police, firearms registry and family court before 'premeditated' 2018 shootings



Jack and Jennifer Edwards were shot dead by their father, John Edwards, in Sydney in July 2018. An inquest has found that their deaths could have been prevented.

A series of critical "errors and omissions" made by police, firearms registry staff and a family court lawyer in [New South Wales](#) allowed a man with a decades-long history of domestic violence to murder his two teenage children in 2018.

The state coroner, Teresa O'Sullivan, on Wednesday repeatedly paused to compose herself as she read out the findings of a months-long inquest into the deaths of Jack and Jennifer Edwards, who were aged 15 and 13 when killed in 2018.

The two teenagers were shot dead by their estranged father, John Edwards, a 68-year-old retired financial planner and former member of the Australian defence force. Police at the time described the shootings, on the afternoon of 5 July, as ["premeditated and planned"](#).

The bodies of the children were found beneath a desk in Jack's bedroom – where they had hidden after Edwards stalked Jennifer on her way home from school.

John Edwards inquest unravels questions at the heart of father's killings
[Read more](#)

Later that night, Edwards killed himself. Their mother and his estranged wife, Olga, slept in her son's bed after his death before she killed herself in December that year.

An emotional O'Sullivan on Wednesday described the deaths as a "preventable" crime, pointing to a litany of errors made by police, the state's firearms registry and the family court before the shootings, which she said were "a stark reminder of the broader systemic problems that face too many women and children every day".

"It is difficult to imagine the pain that Olga felt when she returned home from work on 5 July 2018 to find police at her home and [realise] her **two children who she loved dearly had been killed**," O'Sullivan said.

"This moment was the crystallisation of the fear she had harboured as the victim of domestic abuse [and] as the mother of two children [who were] victims of domestic violence."

O'Sullivan's 270-page report included 24 recommendations after she heard from more than 30 witnesses during the inquest. The recommendations included a call for police in the state to bolster mandatory domestic violence training for officers, training for firearm registry staff to recognise risks of domestic violence, and better information sharing between the gun registry, police and the family court. Investigations after the shootings revealed Edwards had what the counsel assisting the inquest, Kate Richardson SC, called a "propensity for domestic violence and a history of psychological and physical assaults stretching back to the early 1990s".

But despite significant evidence that the family had disclosed Edwards' violence to police and officials in the family court system, O'Sullivan identified a litany of serious errors made by court officials, police and firearms registry staff.

Describing the shooting as "a tragedy" was not sufficient, she said.

"To describe this as a tragedy is to import a sense of inevitability, that nothing could have been done to change the outcome," she said. "Instead, the evidence before this court plainly reveals that the deaths of Jack and Jennifer Edwards were preventable."

The inquest heard that when their marriage broke down in March 2016 after years of abuse, Olga had made two reports to police about Edwards' conduct, including his violence towards Jack.

But the details of allegations were **misrecorded by a senior constable** who had never opened the police handbook on family violence, the coroner found. Olga was recorded as a victim and Edwards the "person named" while the incident was incorrectly classified as "no offence detected".

Lawyer who represented children killed by John Edwards subject of complaints in NSW, tribunal hears [Read more](#)

In a second instance, when Olga reported that Edwards had shown up to her yoga class in early 2017, the officer recorded the incident incorrectly, meaning it did not show up on Edwards' police record. These "errors and omissions" meant that when Edwards later applied for a firearms licence the events did not show up on his file, the coroner said. NSW police, she said, had "failed to undertake reasonable inquiries" in the first instance and failed to investigate the second incident adequately.

Key to the inquest had been understanding how Edwards gained a firearms permit despite a long history of domestic violence allegations made against him by numerous former partners and other children.

In her findings, O'Sullivan was scathing about the role of the firearms registry, saying staff lacked formal training and failed to recognise Edwards' long pattern of domestic violence when granting him the licence that allowed him to buy the deadly weapons he used to kill his children.

She said information relied on by staff at the registry was "unduly narrow" because of a mistaken belief that a licence should only be refused if there was a "mandatory" reason to do. There was a "complete failure to appreciate the pattern of domestic violence going back 24 years".

NSW police said on Wednesday the firearms registry had undergone significant changes since the shootings – something O'Sullivan noted in her findings.

“Since 2018, the NSW Firearms Registry has undergone an extensive restructure which has resulted in enhanced compliance and better identification of breaches of the legislation,” a police spokesperson said in a statement.

“Significant changes to the firearms registry processes and systems have led to greater scrutiny and assessment of licence application and renewals which are now oversighted by senior adjudicators.” The assessments mean a licence can be suspended or revoked on a number of grounds, including involvement in a domestic violence-related incident, mental health-related events, involvement in criminal activity, association with criminal groups or being in the public interest.

The spokesperson said police would “review the [inquest] findings and consider all recommendations that are directed to police”.

O’Sullivan also referred the independent children’s lawyer, Debbie Morton – who was tasked to represent Jack and Jennifer’s best interests in the family court – to the Office of the Legal Services Commissioner to “investigate whether any disciplinary action ought to be taken”.

The coroner found Morton had not properly considered objective evidence, or the statements by Olga Edwards and the children, before addressing the family court in relation to Edwards’ risk.

Victims of John Edwards detail decades of abuse at the hands of man who murdered children

[Read more](#)

The inquest was told that the Edwards children had spoken of their father’s violence to several health professionals and experts involved in the court proceedings. But the independent children’s lawyer told the inquest the teenagers hadn’t raised those concerns with her before she pushed for weekly access visits.

Morton defended not telling the family court months later that Jennifer wanted an explicit order forbidding her father from contacting her, saying judges and magistrates had previously told her not to disclose a child’s actual wish in court.

O’Sullivan was critical of the lawyer, saying she had “failed to inform the court of Jack and Jennifer’s views about contact with their father” and “did not properly consider the available objective evidence”. Olga was the seventh woman with whom Edwards had children – he had 10 children in total – and police records showed that allegations of violence and stalking against him had been made in relation to four of his previous partners, one of his adult daughters and, as recently as 2016, Jack and Jennifer.

But the inquest heard NSW police had not charged Edwards with any offence since 1998 and had approved his gun licence in 2017.

March 2, 2022
SACRAMENTO, CA

California Mass Killing Raises Troubling Questions

The father who fatally shot his three daughters and a man at a California church this week repeatedly threatened to kill his estranged girlfriend



SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- The father who fatally shot his three daughters and a man at a California church this week repeatedly threatened to kill his estranged girlfriend and scared their girls so much they cried and one bit off her fingernails, according to a restraining order that was supposed to keep him away from guns and bullets.

But 39-year-old David Mora had both when he showed up Monday for a supervised visit with his daughters, ages 13, 10 and 9. He shot them, the chaperone he and his ex-girlfriend had agreed could oversee the weekly visits, and then himself.

The violence at The Church in Sacramento, a nondenominational Christian place of worship, raised troubling questions: How did Mora get a gun? Should his arrest a week earlier on felony charges have prompted postponement of his visitation? And what pushed him over the edge to commit such a heinous act two days before his middle daughter turned 11?

The Sacramento County Sheriff's Office has said little publicly about what investigators have learned. "We are not disclosing the type of weapon at this time. How he came to possess a firearm will be part of the investigation," Sgt. Rodney Grassmann said in a text message Wednesday.

Mora's five-year restraining order barred him from possessing firearms, and on a court document he submitted he denied having any. Moreover, his ex-girlfriend, who had lived with him and their daughters, didn't believe he had any firearms and so didn't seek what's known as a "red flag" restraining order.

Imposing such an order puts the person's name into databases that are checked when someone tries to purchase a weapon. That kind of order stopped a former University of California, Los Angeles lecturer from buying a handgun in Colorado last fall. Matthew Harris was arrested last month after making violent threats that prompted UCLA officials to cancel on-campus instruction for a day.

Faith Whitmore, chief executive of the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center that provides services to victims of domestic abuse, said a case manager and an attorney who worked with Mora's estranged girlfriend last April had no indication Mora had a gun and so there was no reason to seek the "red flag" order.

"At the time that she submitted the petition for the restraining order, she had checked that he did not have a weapon," Whitmore said. "He may or may not have had it, but she was not aware of it." A five-year restraining order is the most significant of its type and underscores the threat he posed, Whitmore said. In her petition for the restraining order, the woman said he repeatedly threatened to kill her.

"Three years is sort of normal, or less. Five years means she (the court commissioner who issued the restraining order) is taking it very, very seriously," Whitmore said.

With no indication that Mora had a weapon, there would be no reason for a firearms removal hearing, said Julianna Lee, a supervising attorney who oversees domestic violence and family law cases at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. A hearing can lead to a search of a person's home.

Many weapons are purchased illegally and so-called "ghost guns" that contain no registration number can be made at home. In those cases, the owner wouldn't show up in a database that only tracks legal purchases.

Other family law experts said it's unlikely as a practical matter that Mora's arrest last week on charges including assaulting a police officer could have been used to prevent his court-ordered supervised visitation with his daughters.

There is no formal process for police to notify his estranged girlfriend. And had she learned of it informally, she would have had to contact a lawyer to ask a judge to modify the visitation order on an emergency basis— all in less than a week.

"It's every family law attorney's worst nightmare," said Betty Nordwind, executive director of the Harriett Buhai Center of Family Law in Los Angeles.

Kelly Alison Behre, director of the University of California, Davis School of Law's Family Protection & Legal Assistance Clinic, agreed with the difficulty in seeking such a change.

She noted that judges generally favor keeping some sort of contact between parents and their children, yet in the most tragic cases "court-ordered visitation with an abusive party provides the abusive party with a tool to further harm his victim through their children."

Mora's restraining order and his arrest last week in Merced County would routinely have been entered into a law enforcement database, said Lee. She said the shooting less than a week later shows the lingering lack of communication despite legislators' efforts to close such gaps with a new law.

The shooting prompted promises from California state lawmakers to look for gaps in what advocates say are already the nation's strictest gun regulations.

"How did this happen? Is there a loophole in law that we need to correct?" Democratic Assemblyman Mike Gipson asked.

"The legal system failed. We need to do better," Democratic state Sen. Susan Rubio said.

Rubio noted that lawmakers tightened visitation requirements and the state's domestic violence law last year. But she said the slayings show "we have more work to do. Law enforcement, judges, advocates and legislators need to work together to close the gaps in the legal system."

Research by the advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety found that a current or former intimate partner or family member was among victims in at least 53% of shootings that killed four or more people

in the United States from 2009 to 2020. The deaths of nearly three in four children killed in mass shootings were related to domestic violence.

Lisa Henry, a volunteer leader with the affiliated California Moms Demand Action, which supports gun restrictions, said the slayings are “a tragic reminder of the importance of disarming domestic abusers.”

Dazio reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press News Researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed.

June, 29, 2021
HARRIS COUNTY, TX

Gunman Shoots Ex-Wife 4 Times on Day of Court Appearance for Child Custody Battle, Deputies Say



HARRIS COUNTY, Texas (KTRK) -- A man accused of shooting his ex-wife four times Monday morning, the day they were scheduled to appear in court for a child custody hearing, has been arrested.

Harris County sheriff's deputies were called to a home on Memorial Crossing Drive near Memorial Falls Drive in response to a shooting/home invasion around 3:30 a.m. Monday.

A preliminary investigation revealed that Andrea Wright's ex-husband cut off all power to her home, broke into the back window and shot her four times.

Aaron B. Wright was located and arrested later Monday morning and booked into the Harris County Jail, according to Sheriff Ed Gonzalez. He's charged with aggravated assault.

Andrea has undergone at least one surgery and will likely need more, according to her current boyfriend.

Court records show that Aaron filed divorce two years ago almost to the exact day of the shooting.

In February 2020, Andrea was granted a temporary protective order against Aaron, but a judge denied her attempt to extend it in November of that year.

Both neighbors and Andrea's current boyfriend said the former couple has a tumultuous relationship.

Records from HCSO show three calls for service to her address since March, including a terroristic threat and a suspicious vehicle. Precinct 4 has at least 13 calls from both Aaron and Andrea between 2019 and 2020. Many were requests from Andrea for welfare checks on their children while they were staying at their father's home.

Their four children between the ages of 5 and 12 were home, sleeping in their beds during the shooting, according to Harris County Deputy Investigator John Mook. They were all uninjured.

Investigators say Aaron may have anticipated losing custody of the kids when the pair was scheduled to appear in court Monday for a child custody hearing.

Aaron reportedly used the power box on the side of the home, which was unlocked at the time of the

shooting, to cut off the power.

When asked if the ex-husband had made threats before, Mook said he had a history with Andrea's new boyfriend.

"I do understand that he has threatened the new boyfriend multiple times," Mook said. "I'm sure this was a contentious divorce as well. We're looking into all of that."

Surveillance video shows a second suspect with Aaron at the scene. Deputies believe the second suspect is his new girlfriend.

She has not been charged in the case. The Harris County Sheriff's Office said they are working to positively identify everyone involved.

The pair reportedly drove to the home in Aaron's work truck, parked down the street and approached on foot. They both fled the scene on foot, according to Mook.

The four children are safe with their grandmother, according to investigators.

A [GoFundMe account](#) has been set up to help the family with expenses.

<https://www.newsherald.com/story/news/2021/08/06/bay-county-florida-dad-who-shot-kids-lose-parental-rights/5510577001/>

August 6, 2021

PANAMA CITY, FL

A Bay County Father Who Shot at His Kids Was Set to Keep His Parental Rights. Not Anymore.

PANAMA CITY — A circuit court judge's decision not to terminate the parental rights of a father who shot into a vehicle occupied by two adults and his two young children has been overturned on appeal.

Judge Brantley S. Clark Jr.'s decision to deny a petition from the mother of the children to remove the parental rights of Christopher Lee King — handed down even as King was incarcerated and facing five charges, including attempted murder — was overturned on Thursday.

the verdict: Jury finds Callaway man guilty in Bay County first-degree attempted murder case

More: Bail doubled for man accused of shooting at children



Christopher Lee King

King was convicted of all charges on April 28 and was sentenced on May 19 to 53 years in prison. Clark's ruling stemmed, according to the appeals court findings, from his decision that evidence presented at the termination of parental rights hearing "did not demonstrate that termination was the least restrictive means to protect (King's) children."

"May the court do this, even though it concluded, by clear and convincing evidence, that the father had engaged in the egregious conduct set out (by statute) as a ground for termination?," First District Court of Appeals justices weighing the appeal asked rhetorically. "We say no and reverse."

The incident for which King faced charges occurred in October of 2018, just five days after Category 5 Hurricane Michael had devastated Bay County.

In the aftermath of the storm, King's estranged wife and a boyfriend arrived at King's East Callaway Heights home to take the children, aged 5 and 3, with them to shelter. King became angry, grabbed a handgun and demanded that the children stay with him, according to police reports and court records.

"The boyfriend started to drive the truck away, with (the wife) in the front passenger seat and the kids in the back," the appeals court wrote in its findings. "(King) fired multiple shots into the back of the truck,

bullets shattering the back window and whizzing within inches of the children's heads. One struck the boyfriend in the back of the head; he did not die, but he was seriously injured."

The boyfriend lost control of his truck after being struck and swerved into a ditch, the findings noted.

"The mother, sitting in the front passenger seat, hit her head on the windshield. Blood from the boyfriend's headwound splattered onto the kids, one of whom also suffered cuts from the broken glass," it said.

Following the shooting, King attempted to pull the children from the wrecked truck and briefly held his wife at gunpoint before leaving the scene to call 911, according to reports.

He was charged with attempted murder with a handgun, three counts of attempted manslaughter with a handgun and firing a weapon into a vehicle. On May 19 he was sentenced to serve a total of 53 years in prison with a minimum mandatory requirement that he be incarcerated for at least 25 years.

The appeals court justices found that Clark had issued his ruling despite guidance from state statute that says grounds for termination of parental rights exist if a parent-child relationship threatens the life and or well being of the child or, separately, if circumstances exist that could lead to the parent spending "a significant portion of the child's minority" behind bars.

"This outrageous incident, along with other prior violent acts and threats involving the family, easily fit within the statutory definition of 'egregious conduct,'" Justice Scott Makar said in an opinion accompanying the order of reversal. "And thereby warranted the termination of the father's parental rights without a remedial reunification plan."

The First District Court of Appeals remanded the case back to the Bay County Circuit Court with orders that Clark issue a final judgment terminating King's parental rights.

Records: Greene Township Father who Killed Children and Himself was 'Very Angry' Over Divorce

In days before father fatally shot his two children and himself in Greene Township, he had grown more upset over divorce, according to court records.

Richard A. Zimmer was getting increasingly upset over his pending divorce.

His mood was apparent by June 15. That was two weeks before the state police, on Tuesday, said the 48-year-old Zimmer used a shotgun to kill his two children and then himself at his Greene Township home, which he tried to set on fire before his death.

By June 15, Zimmer's wife had grown concerned that Zimmer had become "very angry" at her as the two tried to reach a settlement on child custody and financial matters, according to a letter included in court records.

And on Tuesday, Zimmer was scheduled to appear at a contempt hearing in his divorce case at the Erie County Courthouse.

The hearing was at 10 a.m.

Zimmer never showed up.

Four hours later, concerned relatives went to Zimmer's house, at 9656 Sampson Road, south of Lake Pleasant Road and across the road from the Eriez Speedway in central Erie County.

The relatives saw smoke. Firefighters arrived. They found Zimmer's body inside along with that of the Zimmers' daughter, Madison, 13, and son, Zachary, 10.



Investigators have not said how much, if at all, the deaths were related to the Zimmers' divorce proceedings and the contempt hearing, though the state police said in a news release that Richard Zimmer failed to appear at a "custody hearing" on Tuesday, leading "concerned family members" to go to his house. Police said the deaths occurred sometime on Monday or Tuesday.

Man, children killed: 3 dead in Greene Township house fire; multiple fire crews respond

But court records in the divorce case show the tension between Zimmer and his wife, Melissa A. Zimmer, had gradually increased since she filed for divorce on Dec. 10 after 10 years of marriage.

Contempt claims

As their lawyers worked on a divorce settlement, Melissa Zimmer and Richard Zimmer continued to share custody of their two children.

Richard Zimmer had Madison and Zachary from Monday to Wednesday evening during the week and every other weekend, according to court records. Melissa Zimmer had them on the other weekdays and weekends.

The contentious issues, according to court records, involved the children's divorce-related counseling and Richard Zimmer's financial records and ability to secure health insurance.

In May, Melissa Zimmer's lawyer filed a motion for contempt, claiming that Richard Zimmer had failed to provide documents to aid in crafting the divorce settlement.

The outcome of that contempt motion is unclear in court records, but the records show that Melissa Zimmer raised another contempt issue in June. She questioned whether her husband had secured health insurance as required.

Melissa Zimmer, according to court records, also wanted to amend the custody agreement to have the children see a different counselor. Her other concerns were that her husband's new job was affecting how much time he could spend with the children and that he had cashed in accrued vacation time from the U.S. Postal Service, where he formerly worked as a letter carrier.

Melissa Zimmer's lawyer, Paige Peasley, detailed the issues in the June 15 letter, sent to Richard Zimmer's lawyer, Patrick Kelley.

In concluding the letter, Peasley wrote: "My client advises me that Mr. Zimmer is very angry with her as she is forcing the contempt matters to Court. As you know, we are only asking him to follow the law. Also, as you know, his anger against my client is not in the children's best interest."

Peasley could not be immediately reached for comment on Wednesday.

Kelley responded to the contempt request in a motion on June 22. He wrote that Richard Zimmer was exploring how to get COBRA insurance through the Postal Service and that Zimmer had just gotten a new job through which he expected to be eligible for insurance coverage for the entire family.

Kelley in the same motion filed a counterclaim against Melissa Zimmer. Kelley asked that a judge hold her in contempt for wanting to switch counselors for the children, despite agreeing to the counselor listed in the original custody order.

Richard Zimmer's position, Kelley wrote, is "that the mother is intentionally subverting the children's therapy."

On June 22, Erie County Judge Elizabeth Kelly scheduled the contempt hearing for Tuesday.

'We are deeply saddened'

On Wednesday, Pennsylvania State Police investigators continued to collect background information in an effort to better understand what led to what the police classified as a "murder-suicide-arson."

Erie County Coroner Lyell Cook identified the children on Wednesday afternoon as Madison Zimmer and Zachary Zimmer. Cook ruled the deaths of the children as homicides and the death of Richard Zimmer as a suicide. Autopsies will not be performed, Cook said.

Madison Zimmer attended Wattsburg Area Middle School and Zachary Zimmer attended Wattsburg Area Elementary School, according to the Wattsburg Area School District.

"We are deeply saddened to hear of the recent loss of two of our students," the school district said in a [statement](#). "The administrative and guidance staff are working together to support students and staff affected by this tragedy. Please contact your child's school office if you need assistance connecting them with resources during this time."

'Multiple victims'

On Tuesday, state police were called to Richard Zimmer's house after firefighters found the three bodies, said Lt. Mark Weindorf, crime section supervisor for state police Troop E in Lawrence Park Township.

Two of the deceased were pronounced dead at the scene at 2:47 p.m. and the third at 2:49 p.m., as they were located in different areas of the house.

The Kuhl Hose Co. was dispatched to the residence at 2:01 p.m. Tuesday, according to Erie County 911. Firefighters discovered "multiple victims in various rooms of the residence" as they were putting out the fire, according to the state police's news release.

Firefighters found fire in the home's basement and on the first floor, Kuhl Hose Fire Chief Don Erbin said Wednesday. He said firefighters contained the fires to those areas, but there was heat and smoke damage throughout the house.

State police held the house as a crime scene after the bodies were discovered but released it on Tuesday night, Weindorf said.

The state police's preliminary investigation determined that Zimmer "inflicted fatal injuries" on the children with a shotgun that he owns, according to the news release.

"After both victims were deceased," according to the release, "he started multiple fires within the residence and fatally shot himself."

A GoFundMe page has been set up to help pay for funeral costs for the children.

Visit <https://bit.ly/3w7Q1M3> to donate.

Anyone with information that could assist in the ongoing investigation is asked to call state police at 814-898-1641.



<https://www.wifr.com/content/news/Dixon-Police-investigating-murder-of-young-child--445507623.html>

September 21, 2017

DIXON, IL

UPDATE: Funeral Arrangements Set for Dixon Child Murdered by Father



DIXON, ILL. (WIFR) – Funeral arrangements are set for the Dixon kindergartner allegedly shot and killed by his father earlier this week.

The family of five-year old Christopher Michaels will hold a visitation for him at Preston Schilling Funeral Home in Dixon on Monday at 10 a.m. with a funeral service later that afternoon. He will be laid to rest at the Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens. A memorial fund has also been created for Christopher's family.

DIXON, ILL. (WIFR) -- A mother opens up about her son after his father allegedly shoots and kills him and then kills himself.

"He always found a way to make me laugh... Always," says Kassondra Michaels, when thinking of her son.

For Kassondra Michaels, the last 48 hours still seem surreal.

"I am still in shock. I woke up this morning, and I was hoping I'd be waking up from a nightmare," reflects Michaels.

She's still coming to terms with losing her son, 5-year-old Christopher Michaels, "He loved taking pictures together. His favorite thing to do every day was, 'Let's get on snapchat, mommy. Let's take pictures. I haven't... I haven't been able to look at my phone since.'"

The kindergartener was found dead in this home at 1014 Fargo Avenue in Dixon around 3:30 Monday afternoon. His father, Robert Michaels, reportedly shot the boy and then shot himself.

Police say Kassondra brought Christopher over to play video games with him. Kassondra left them in an upstairs room. That's when she says she heard two gunshots.

"Everything just happened so fast that I didn't even know what to think," recalls Kassondra. Neighbors say this is a shock for the whole area.

"Ya know, you think you're immune to it, but I don't think anyone's truly immune to it anywhere," says Brian Broers, who lives across the street from the home where the murder took place.

"That beautiful face... I'm gonna miss everything about him," says Kassondra, tearfully.

Police say Robert Michaels was prohibited by the DCFS from having contact with Christopher. Robert Michaels was also under investigation for child sexual abuse. However, Christopher was not the alleged victim of that abuse.

Updated September 18, 2017

DIXON, Ill. (WIFR) – A 5-year old child is murdered in a murder suicide by his father in Dixon this afternoon.

Dixon Police say they were called to the 1000 block of Fargo Avenue at around 3:37 p.m. for reports of shots fired. Officers forced entry to find a door barricaded on the 2nd floor of the residence. Once they made it into the room, officers found 5-year old Christopher Michaels dead from a gunshot wound to the head as well as his father Robert Michaels, also with a gunshot wound to the head but still breathing. A semi-automatic handgun was found on the floor next to Robert's hand.

Robert was taken to KSB Hospital where he was later flown to a Rockford hospital. He was pronounced dead. He has been under investigation by the Dixon Police Department since September 12th for sexual abuse to another child. Dixon Police were working with Shining Star Children's Advocacy Center and the Multi-Disciplinary Child Protection Team including the Department of Children and Family Services. A plan was put in place by the DCFS to keep Robert away from his son.

Police say that Robert was asked by his son to play a video game. They went upstairs along with Christopher's mother. Once through the door of the room, Robert shut and barricaded the door after telling Christopher's mother to grab something leaving her out of the room. She heard two gunshots and received no response when she yelled for them. She left the house to go to her car and get her phone and called the police.

Christopher Michaels was a kindergartner at St. Anne's in Dixon, Illinois.

The incident is still under investigation.

DIXON, Ill. (WIFR) – Dixon Police are currently investigating the murder of a young child this afternoon in Dixon.

Police are calling this an apparent murder/suicide. A press conference is being held tonight at 8:00 p.m. in the Dixon Police Department community room.

We'll update this story as we learn more.

<https://ktla.com/news/local-news/4-children-1-woman-shot-and-killed-at-lancaster-home-man-detained/>

November 29, 2021
LANCASTER, CA

Father Arrested in Shooting Deaths of 4 Children, Grandmother Found at Lancaster Home



A 29-year-old father was arrested on suspicion of murder for the shooting deaths of his four children and their grandmother, who were found at a Lancaster home Sunday night, officials and family members said.

Deputies first responded to the home on the 3500 Block of Garnet Lane after getting a call around 10:27 p.m., Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department officials said in a [news release](#).

They arrived to find the grandmother, a woman in her 50s, suffering from gunshot wounds to her upper torso.

One girl and three boys — all under the age of 12 — were also found with gunshot wounds to their upper torsos.

All five were pronounced dead at the scene by responding paramedics.

Germarcus David, the children's father and son-in-law of the woman, was detained when he showed up at the Lancaster Sheriff's Station lobby, the Sheriff's Department said.

He was interviewed by investigators and arrested Monday morning.

David was being held in lieu of \$2 million bail.

Family members told KTLA the victims were found by the children's mother, who is the daughter of the woman killed.

Neighbor Reginald Beltran told KTLA he saw the mother a short time after the deadly shootings. "We can hear her screaming over the phone," Beltran recalled. "The only that that was very clear... she was screaming 'my babies are dead, my babies are dead.'"

Video from the scene showed ambulances and police cars swarming the suburban neighborhood as investigators probed the home that was closed off with police tape.

Officials have not named the victims and no further details were immediately available.

Anyone with information about the killings is asked to contact the Sheriff's Department Homicide Bureau at 323-890-5500. Those who prefer to provide information anonymously can call Crime Stoppers at 800-222-8477.

February 11, 2022

MIAMI LAKES, FL

Before **Killing His Children** in Miami Lakes, Father had History of Domestic, Mental Troubles



*Humberto Christian Tovar, as seen on Instagram, with his **children Valeria, 12, and Matias, 9.** - INSTAGRAM*

Before **he shot and killed his two young children along a canal in Miami Lakes**, Humberto Christian Tovar Zapata tried to portray himself on Instagram as a doting father. In one of his last posts, he proudly posed in a black-and-white selfie with **his daughter, Valeria, 12, and son, Matias, 9.**

But behind the social-media facade, according to interviews and new police reports obtained by the Miami Herald, there were troubling signs the 41-year-old Tovar was spiraling toward violence.

The day before the murders, his estranged wife walked into the Hialeah police station to report that he'd vandalized her car after briefly visiting with the children. On two other occasions, she'd reported Tovar's aggressive behavior to police, although there wasn't enough evidence to arrest him.

He also struggled with bipolar disorder that made him quick to snap, and at least twice tried to kill himself, family said.

"I wish people would see him with love and compassion," said his aunt, Marta Laverde. "It can happen to anyone. We are not free of mental health problems."

Three days after the shocking murders and suicide, a clearer picture was emerging of Tovar and his estranged family, who lived in Hialeah. The children's mother is now raising money for the family on GoFundMe.



Valeria Tovar, 12, and Matias Tovar, 9, were shot and killed by their father in Miami Lakes on Feb. 8, 2022. – GOFUNDME

Valeria attended Hialeah Educational Academy, where grief counselors were on hand this week for students reeling from the deaths. Friends left notes of remembrance and candles outside the school. Matias attended Hialeah's Tutor Me Academy, where his sister had previously attended. "His last report was all A-pluses," said the school's tearful owner, Amarys Marine, who described both siblings as smart with perfect attendance records. "We're very devastated."

The two also attended after-school karate classes at Rising Sun Karate School in Hialeah. "They enjoyed the competition. They were happy little kids and enjoyed being in the dojo," said Luis Lahera, who runs the school with his son, Louis Lahera. "It hit us very hard. It's a great loss."

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Tovar, who went by Christian, worked at a bicycle shop and lived in North Miami-Dade. He'd been separated from his wife but regularly saw his children.

His aunt said Tovar had been undergoing treatment, was on and off medication and that he tried to end his life several times when he was in his 20s. His mother also said he'd been committed for psychiatric evaluations under Florida's Baker Act at least twice.

Tovar had no criminal history, save for a minor arrest for having drug paraphernalia in 2001 — a case that was dropped.

BRUSHES WITH POLICE

More recently, in March 2019, Hialeah officers were dispatched to the family's home after they got into a "heated verbal argument over filing for divorce," according to a police report obtained by the Herald. She told police Tovar pushed her onto the couch, got on top of her and began "yelling profanities."

She received a minor cut on her finger, the police report said, in breaking free from his grasp. Officers offered to take her to a shelter and she declined, the report said. She later told a detective that Tovar is bipolar and gets upset quickly." Tovar, however, claimed that she pushed him first and "at no time would he intentionally harm" the woman.

Because there were no independent witnesses — and officers could not determine who was the "primary aggressor," no arrest was made.

The following year, in 2020, the mother showed up to the Hialeah police station to report that Tovar got mad because she didn't want to have sex and became "aggressive toward her." She kicked him in the chest, and he left her alone, sleeping that night in the living room, according to a police report.

She decided against going to a domestic-violence shelter, and did not want police to take photos of her. She told police officers she was going to get a restraining order against Tovar. Records show that no restraining order petition was filed in Miami-Dade County.

A detective followed up. Tovar denied assaulting his wife. But because of the delayed disclosure, and lack of physical evidence or independent witnesses, no arrest was made and the wife was referred to the State Attorney's Office. It does not appear she complained to prosecutors; the officer said Monday it could find no record she did.

By August 2021, she and Tovar had separated.



Humberto Christian Tovar, as seen on Instagram. - INSTAGRAM

On Sunday night, Tovar visited their kids at her house to “spend time with them in the parking lot.” After about half an hour, the mother took the kids inside because it was past their bedtime. Tovar “became upset,” according to the police report.

The next morning, the mother found her car had been vandalized, with damage all along the right side. A review of her surveillance camera revealed Tovar was to blame, the report said. “I’m not paying anything, I will take you to court and take away the kids,” he told her when she called to ask him to pay for damages.

She reported the case to police on Monday.

On Tuesday night, Tovar picked up the kids and took them to their favorite Hialeah restaurant, Mi Sandwich Cubano in Hialeah, according to family. Then, with his kids at his side next to the lake, he called his mother, Luz Kuznitz.

“He asked his mother if she wanted to say hello to the children. She asked the kids if they were having a good time and they said they were fine,” Laverde said.

“He loved his children. He had great memories with them,” said his cousin Katherine Zapata.

But police say that Tovar, armed with a stolen gun, took the children to a canal bank on the 6400 block of Miami Lakes Drive, near a Publix supermarket, and shot them dead. Then, he turned the gun on himself.

Before the shootings, Tovar contacted his wife either by text or phone and whatever he told her had her worried enough to contact police and frantically begin searching for the children. Laverde said after being informed of the tragedy she went to place a candle at Tovar’s apartment and neighbors there said police had come by earlier desperately trying to find Tovar.

But it was too late. The children’s mother had tracked her kids’ phones to the canal bank — where she made the tragic discovery.

March 21, 1999

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Father Kills 3 Children, Himself

PROVIDENCE – After stealing a gun and tying up two adults, a father shot his three children to death as their mother ran to call police, Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. and police said yesterday.

The father then committed suicide about midnight Saturday in what Cianci is calling "one of the most terrible tragedies" in the history of this city of about 160,000 residents.

"They were just three innocent kids," said Cianci at a somber press conference. "The very nature of this violent act makes it incomprehensible. It fills our hearts with sadness."

The children's mother had broken up with the gunman, 42-year-old Maurice Young Sr., earlier in the day, Cianci said.

After the breakup, Young went to his cousin's home, attacked him with a hammer and stole his .357-caliber revolver.

Young then picked up his daughters, 9-year-old Jessica and 12-year-old Jasmin, from a friend's house in East Providence, where they had planned to spend the night. He drove them home, where his 6-year-old son, Maurice Jr., was sleeping, Cianci said.

The little boy was alone with his 10-year-old cousin in the second-floor apartment, located up a dusty staircase on scrappy street in the city's Armory district. Young's girlfriend, 31-year-old Waleska Cruz, had stepped out briefly with her sister and a friend to buy soda.

When they returned, Young confronted them with the gun. Cruz knocked it away and ran from the house to call the police. After tying up the sister and her friend, Young killed the children. One was heard pleading, "Don't shoot me," according to Cianci.

Young then shot himself.

The time police arrived a few minutes after Cruz's call, Young and his children lay dead or near death. Cruz was being treated with sedatives for psychological shock last night at Rhode Island Hospital, police said.

Police said Young told no one why he wanted to kill the children and left no note explaining his brutality. The shootings, combined with a fatal gang attack about the same time, raised Providence's total of homicides for the year to nine.

Police and Cianci said there was little indication to them that Young was violent.

He had struck Cruz on Tuesday, but police said the attack was not reported to them until after the shootings. Authorities said Young was angry, for a reason they said they could not explain, that one of his daughters was doing homework at 6 a.m. that day.

Young left the apartment that day and did not see his family again until Saturday.

Young was never arrested for any violent crime or felony, police said. He had no known record of treatment for mental illness.

He worked full-time with children, as a teacher's assistant at a Providence public elementary school, and had received good evaluations for more than one year.

A neighbor said Young was friendly.

"He used to come here and borrow things. Nice guy," Gerry Roy said. "All the neighbors are very saddened by what the heck happened. There was no indication. We never expected anything."

In a family portrait released by police, Young casts a hard, unsmiling look at the camera while his chubby daughter Jessica, biting her lower lip, rests her hands on his shoulders.

After being absent from his family for more than four days, Young appeared at his daughters' friend's home in East Providence early Saturday evening. He and Cruz had a calm discussion, in which she told him their relationship was over, Cianci said.

Young left, and showed up at the home of his cousin, William Perry, saying he had a problem with people at a bar and needed a gun. When Perry refused to help him, Young left but returned in a short while, swinging the hammer.

Back at the family's home, Cruz was entertaining her sister, Vaneza Vallejo, and her sister's boyfriend, Edwin Lauriano, who were visiting from New York with their son.

When the three adults stepped out, Young returned with the girls, Cianci said.

Police said after Cruz fled, Young forced Lauriano to tie up Vallejo. Young then tied up Lauriano.

Jasmin then came out of her room.

Police said Young led her back to her room, then shot her once in the head.

The two adults freed themselves and ran out, **hearing 9-year-old Jessica pleading for her life. Each child was shot in the head in a different room,** said police chief Col. Urbano Prignano Jr. The 10-year-old cousin hid and was not hurt.

Television reporters interview a neighbor yesterday, who lives across the street from the home at 35 Hammond St, in Providence, where four people, **two of them children, where killed in an apparent domestic dispute Saturday.**

<https://wreg.com/news/local/father-tells-police-he-threw-baby-in-river-killed-her-mother/>

February 3, 2022
MEMPHIS, TN

Father Tells Police He Threw Baby in River, Killed Her Mother



UPDATE: Brandon Isabelle appeared in court in Memphis on Monday. [See coverage here.](#)

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A young father charged with killing his two-day-old child and her mother admitted that he lured the woman to her death, then took the baby and threw her into the Mississippi River, according to details outlined in court documents.

Brandon Isabelle, who turned 25 on Tuesday, is charged with two counts of murder, especially aggravated kidnapping, murder in connection with kidnapping and tampering with evidence.

Father of missing newborn charged with murder

Danielle Hoyle, 27, was found dead Tuesday outside her vehicle on a street in Whitehaven. The drivers-side window of the Chevy Cruze was knocked out.

Police say Hoyle had been shot in the head. Her family said when she left the house, she told them she needed to take the baby to the hospital for testing.

Her baby, Kennedy Hoyle, who was the subject of a statewide AMBER Alert on Wednesday, is presumed dead. Crews searched the boat ramp at the north end of Mud Island, but her body had not been recovered Thursday morning.

Ice, freezing rain coat Memphis area

Police zeroed in on Isabelle, the child's father, as a suspect on Wednesday evening. During questioning, police say he told them he lured Danielle Hoyle to the intersection of Sedgwick and Levi and shot her.

He then told police that he took Kennedy Hoyle, drove her to the north end of Mud Island where the Wolf River enters the Mississippi River, and threw the child in the water. He also said he threw the weapon in the water.

The baby's car seat was found near a dumpster outside a Walmart in Whitehaven, police said.

Isabelle was taken into custody Wednesday. He was given no bond and faces an arraignment hearing Friday. His previous record in Shelby County includes only traffic infractions.

The search for Kennedy was suspended on Thursday due to inclement weather. MPD said they will continue the search when the weather permits them to do so.

<https://weartv.com/news/local/father-dead-after-shooting-3-year-old-child-in-escambia-county>

July 20, 2019
PENSACOLA, FL

Father Shoots Child Before Shooting and Killing Himself in Escambia County



PENSACOLA, Fla. (WEAR) — An investigation is underway after deputies say a man shot his own child before turning the gun on himself.

Deputies with Escambia County Sheriff's Office (ECSO) responded to a shooting victim just before 2:30 p.m. on Wyoming Drive near New York Drive Saturday.

According to ECSO, a father picked his three-year-old child up from the mother's home. About 100 yards outside of the home, ECSO said the father pulled out a pistol and shot the child twice in the head before shooting himself.

The father, identified as Terrence Jackson, was pronounced dead at the scene of the incident.

The child was rushed to a local hospital for treatment. ECSO says the child is in critical condition.

At this time, ECSO says there are no obvious indicators as to why Jackson would have shot his child.

This is a developing story and will be updated as more information becomes available.

<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/kids-were-in-car-outside-while-father-killed-their-mother-himself-in-maryland-police/2907894/>

December 12, 2021

BALTIMORE, MD

Kids Were in Car Outside While Father Killed Their Mother, Himself in Maryland: Police

Officers found the two young children unharmed in the father's car after the shooting, police say



MAN ALLEGEDLY KILLS GIRLFRIEND AND EX-WIFE IN MARYLAND

A man who police say [shot his girlfriend to death in Baltimore before killing his ex-wife and then himself in Howard County](#) Saturday brought his two young children with him in the car to the second shooting, authorities say.

Rajae Shareef Black, 44, of the 7600 block of Ironworks Way in Hanover, shot and killed his ex-wife, 42-year-old Wendy Natalie Black, in the vestibule of her apartment building on Eden Brook Drive in Columbia about 2 p.m., Howard County police said Sunday.

Officers found their two young children in Black's gray BMW X3 in the parking lot of the apartment complex after the shooting. They were not hurt and didn't see the shooting, police said. The children are in a safe environment, authorities said.

Police believe Black went to Howard County shortly after killing his girlfriend earlier Saturday in Baltimore.

At around 1:37 p.m., the Baltimore Police Department said officers responded to the 1500 block of Marshall Street for a report of an alarm, where they noticed signs of a forced entry into a home. Inside, they found an unresponsive 41-year-old woman, believed to be Black's girlfriend, suffering from gunshot wounds. She was pronounced dead on the scene.

Baltimore police discovered a video posted on social media in which the suspect stated his intention to go to Howard County, according to a spokesperson for Howard County police.

By the time the Howard County Police Department learned about the video, the suspect and the second victim were already dead, the spokesperson said.

Police didn't release any further details about the video.

<https://www.wxyz.com/news/region/wayne-county/dearborn-heights-police-man-kills-4-children-shoots-woman>

September 21, 2016
DEARBORN HEIGHTS, MI

Police: **Father Kills 2 Children, 2 Teens** **at Dearborn Heights Home**



Father accused of killing 4 children, injuring wife.

Police say a **man killed four of his children/stepchildren**, and shot and injured their mother at a home Wednesday morning in Dearborn Heights.

A memorial continues to grow outside the home where **four children were killed**.

The home is located on Hipp near Annapolis. Family after family showed up to the doorstep, remembering the victims of Wednesday's killing rampage.

Police tell 7 Action News the man called police around 1:20 a.m. and told them he had killed his whole family. When they arrived, officers found him waiting for them on the front porch. He immediately was taken into custody. Sources are telling 7 Action News he is Gregory Green.

At the home, police found a horrific scene. Officers say the victims were attacked in various ways. **Two teenagers, 17-year-old Kara Allen and 19-year-old Chadney Allen, were found shot and killed inside the home, the two younger children, 4-year-old Kaleigh Green and 6-year-old Koi Green, were found dead in their beds, according to police.**

Kiersten Wilcher, a friend of 17-year old Kara Allen says she would spend time at another friend's house, scared of what her stepfather would do. Wilcher told us, "Domestic violence is real."

Police say the youngest children died from carbon monoxide poisoning. We're told the man manipulated the tail pipe of a car and killed the children with exhaust fumes. They were then placed back into bed, according to police.

The woman is currently listed in fair condition at the hospital. Family has identified her as Faith Green. Police say she was able to speak with investigators. She remains hospitalized after undergoing surgery. She was shot in the foot and cut in the face during the attack.

Police say Gregory Green is the stepfather of the two of the children and the father of the other two. Officers believe marriage problems may have been the motive for the murders. The wife had filed for divorce in August. She also filed for divorce back in 2013, but reconciled.

"We don't have a lot of instances like this...it is a very tragic situation," said Dearborn Heights Mayor Dan Paletko, who is on the scene. "Words can't explain what took place here."

Neighbors describe the family as quiet and hardworking. We're told they just threw a children's birthday party a few weeks ago.

"Just two or three weeks ago, they had a birthday party, balloons and all that stuff out there," said neighbor Ronnie Jones. "They've been working on the house the last two or three months, added doors...garage door they added a bunch of stuff to the house."

Lansing State Journal

<https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/2021/04/15/police-delta-twp-murder-suicide-leaves-2-kids-father-dead/7235276002/>

April 15, 2021

DELTA TOWNSHIP, MI

Police: Delta Twp. Murder-Suicide Leaves Two Kids, Father Dead



DELTA TWP. — Police have confirmed that a 47-year-old father shot and killed his two young children before dying by suicide.

The Eaton County Sheriff's Department was called at about 11 p.m. Tuesday to a home on Old River Trail in Delta Township, according to a news release.

Inside the home, they found 5-year-old Vivian Zwick and her father, 47-year-old Joseph Lechleitner, dead from gunshot wounds, according to police. Vivian's brother, Anson Zwick, 3, was rushed to the hospital in critical condition.

Anson died Wednesday night, police said.

Police said the investigation shows Lechleitner shot both children, then himself. Lechleitner lived in the Shingleton area of the Upper Peninsula, police said.

"We are so sorry for the surviving family," sheriff's department spokesperson Jerri Nesbitt said in a news release. "Our thoughts and prayers go out to them."

Two neighbors, Karlie Carter and Ethan Bensinger, said the kids lived with their mother in the Delta Township home and Lechleitner came to visit about once a month.

Carter said the kids were awesome. The daughter was always "super positive and fun."

"Super great family, and they were always outside doing stuff," Carter said.

She said she saw the family take the kids to the nearby park in a little red wagon on Sunday.

June 23, 2021

BELLEVUE, NEBRASKA

Bellevue Police Investigating **Children's Deaths** as 'Suspicious'; Father Found in California



*Emily and Theodore Price with their mother, Mary Nielsen. Bellevue police on Sunday were investigating the **deaths of the two children**. They were staying with their father.*

Two children who were on a visit to their dad's during their parents' divorce proceedings were found dead Sunday morning in his home.

Bellevue police said **Emily Price, 5, and Theodore Price, 3, were found dead in the home** in the 2700 block of Alberta Avenue.

Their father, Adam L. Price, 35, was found Sunday evening in Pacifica, California, according to a statement from Bellevue police.

"Detectives are no longer searching for anyone else possibly involved in the case," the statement said.

The children's mother, Mary Nielsen, said she and her husband were in the process of getting a divorce. "He was very abusive, controlling and manipulative toward me," she said.

The children were visiting their dad for a week, she said.

The family had lived in Bellevue, but in November, she took her kids and moved back to Illinois, which is where the family was from, she said.

Nielsen said Bellevue police have told her that the deaths are being investigated as homicides.

Bellevue police spokesman Capt. Andy Jashinske said that he could not provide details but that police were investigating the deaths as "suspicious."

"At this point, we don't know exactly what happened," he said. "It's suspicious; we have two children who were located in a home with nobody around."

Nielsen said she last talked with her children on Thursday evening via FaceTime, which is a type of video phone call.

"They seemed happy; everything seemed OK," she said.

Nielsen said she became concerned when she wasn't able to reach the kids on Friday and Saturday. Their dad is under court order to provide daily communication during visits, she said.

She called Bellevue police and asked them to check on their well-being. Officers went to the home twice, Jashinske said. The first time was 9:50 p.m. Saturday, and the second time was 8:59 a.m. Sunday.

Following that unsuccessful effort, Nielsen said she called a friend and asked them to go to the home. The friend found the door unlocked, walked inside and found the children dead, she said.

The friend called police at 11:03 a.m., Jashinske said.

Jashinske said police didn't have sufficient reason to force an entry into the home Saturday night and Sunday morning.

"Officers investigated during both calls for service but did not observe exigent circumstances that would allow them to force entry into the home," he said in a statement.

On her Facebook page, Mary Nielsen said:

"I'm so sorry to see you two go. You did not deserve this and I love you so very much. I would fight a thousand fights to have you back again. Heaven gained two beautiful angels and I hope great grandpa was at the gates to greet you. You were the only reasons I survived everything I did and the only reason I am alive. I love you. Til we meet again my sweet babies"

She said her children were bright and playful.

"They were happy, sweet, loving," she said. "My daughter was extremely smart, you wouldn't know she just turned 5. My son was the typical little boy — jumping off things, playing with superheroes, fake fighting."

By Sunday evening, a [GoFundMe](#) page for burial costs had raised more than \$15,000 of what had become a \$26,000 goal. The goal was originally \$10,000.

Nielsen said she was touched by the support shown to her family.

"The support has been overwhelming, everyone reaching out," she said. "I'm just very thankful."

Anyone with information about the case is asked to contact Bellevue police at 402-593-4111 or Sarpy County Crime Stoppers at 402-592-7867.

The Omaha Police Crime Lab assisted in the investigation.



<https://www.foxnews.com/us/missing-harmony-montgomery-child-abuse-allegations>

January 5, 2022
NEW HAMPSHIRE

Missing Harmony Montgomery: Dad Accused of Giving Partially Blind Daughter Black Eye in 2019, Other Abuse

Manchester police urge anyone with information to call 603-203-6060

[Missing Harmony Montgomery's father arrested in New Hampshire](#)

Nancy Grace argues the system 'failed' in protecting 7-year-old Harmony Montgomery who was last seen in 2019 but recently reported missing by the state.

[Missing](#) Harmony Montgomery's father Adam [allegedly punched](#) the partially blind girl in the face, made her clean a toilet with her toothbrush and stand in the corner for hours, according to [New Hampshire](#) court documents – and then failed to provide confirmation of her whereabouts or well-being from family members and authorities for more than two years.

Harmony was reported missing last week, but police then discovered her whereabouts have been unknown stretching back to the fall of 2019.

Adam Montgomery, an alleged substance abuser with criminal records in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, assumed custody of his daughter in early 2019, according to New Hampshire court documents released Wednesday, after his arrest on assault and child endangerment charges in connection with Harmony's disappearance.



New Hampshire authorities have arrested the father of [missing 7-year-old Harmony Montgomery](#) in connection with a 2019 assault against the child. (Manchester Police)

[MISSING HARMONY MONTGOMERY'S FATHER ARRESTED IN NEW HAMPSHIRE](#)

He is allegedly estranged from his current wife since late last year after relapsing and moving into a sober house, then running off with a woman who claimed they have been romantically involved for at least a year, according to court documents released Wednesday.

They state that Crystal Sorey, Harmony's noncustodial biological mother, told Manchester police on Nov. 18, 2021, that she believed her daughter was missing and that she couldn't get in touch with her father.

Manchester police visited multiple addresses linked to Montgomery but could not find him for weeks. Harmony's whereabouts remain unknown and investigators in multiple states have kicked off a large-scale search effort.

On Dec. 27, New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth and Families also told Manchester police they couldn't find the girl. As investigators dug into the case, they said they discovered that Harmony "had not been physically seen since October/November 2019."

Sorey lost custody of Harmony in 2018, according to the documents, and she told investigators that both she and Montgomery had prior substance abuse issues.

The last time she saw her daughter was during a FaceTime call around Easter in 2019, according to investigators.

"[Harmony] seemed frightened," according to a police affidavit, and Montgomery was visible in the background.

Court documents reveal Sorey regained sobriety by 2021 and tried to locate Montgomery and Harmony. During that time, the adoptive parents of Harmony's biological brother Jamison told Fox News Digital they were also trying to reunite the siblings and were in contact with Sorey.

MISSING HARMONY MONTGOMERY: ADOPTIVE PARENTS' PUSH TO REUNITE SEPARATED SIBLINGS TRIGGERED SUSPICIONS

Police continued to search for Harmony and Montgomery last week and made contact with her uncle, Michael Montgomery, who told them "he had concerns that Adam was physically abusive towards [her]," according to the affidavit.



Manchester police arrested Harmony's dad, Adam Montgomery, Tuesday. The search for her remains ongoing. (Manchester Police Department)

Adam Montgomery's uncle, Kevin Montgomery, reiterated those concerns and said around the time of the alleged 2019 assault he saw Harmony with a black eye. He told police that his nephew told him "I bashed her around the house" as punishment after her little brother started crying.

"Adam explained that he had left [Harmony], who would have been 5 years old at the time, in charge of watching her infant brother while Adam was in the bathroom," the affidavit states, citing Kevin Montgomery's version of events. "Allegedly the younger brother started crying during that time. Adam [allegedly] told Kevin that he returned and found [Harmony] holding her hand over the child's mouth to stop him from crying."

Then, he allegedly punched her in the face.

NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE ANNOUNCE 24/7 DETECTIVE-MANNED TIP LINE FOR MISSING 7-YEAR-OLD HARMONY MONTGOMERY

Harmony is about four feet tall and 50 pounds. She has blonde hair and blue eyes and should be wearing glasses. She's also blind in her right eye.

Court documents do not identify which eye he allegedly struck.

"Kevin said he believed that Adam had relapsed on drugs during that timeframe," the affidavit continues. Montgomery was allegedly an abusive disciplinarian known for hard spankings, forcing Harmony to stand in the corner for hours and forcing her to scrub a toilet with her toothbrush. Montgomery and his current wife, Kayla Montgomery, have three younger children who are all accounted for, according to authorities. She confirmed that she had seen Harmony once with a black eye but said her husband blamed it on one of the other children.

She said she hasn't seen her husband in months because he moved into a sober house and then to Maine. She also told detectives that she hadn't seen Harmony since November or December in 2019, according to the affidavit.



Manchester police arrested Adam Montgomery Tuesday on charges he assaulted his partially blind daughter Harmony when she was 5 years old in 2019, leaving her with a black eye. (Manchester Police) The last time she saw her, she told investigators, was when Adam Montgomery allegedly told her he was driving Harmony to Sorey, who at the time lived in Lowell, Massachusetts.

"Kayla claimed she never saw, or heard about [Harmony] after that day," according to the affidavit. Police tracked Adam Montgomery to a vehicle in Manchester, where he was asleep with a new girlfriend on Dec. 31, according to the affidavit.

The woman told police she knew Montgomery had three children with one woman and a fourth with another, but said he never spoke about Harmony to her in the year they were romantically involved, according to the affidavit.

When police questioned Montgomery, they allege that he gave them contradictory statements – including first claiming to have recently spoken to Harmony and then backtracking to say the last time was when he claimed Sorey picked her up around Thanksgiving 2019.

Then he allegedly stopped answering questions and told investigators, "I have nothing else to say....If I'm not under arrest, I'm leaving."

They arrested him Tuesday, according to a joint statement from local and state prosecutors and Manchester police.

Ahead of his expected arraignment Wednesday, Montgomery waived his right to a bail hearing and agreed to be placed in preventive detention.

The court also issued no-contact orders preventing him from reaching out to Montgomery's mother and his estranged wife.

The search for Harmony is ongoing. Anyone with information is asked to call the dedicated tip line at 603-203-6060.

<https://www.wavy.com/news/investigative/norfolk-father-accused-of-murdering-both-of-his-infant-children-one-year-apart/>

July 8, 2021
NORFOLK, VA

Norfolk Father Accused of **Murdering Both of His Infant Children One Year Apart**



Evonne and Damere Warren

DuWayne E. Warren

NORFOLK, Va. (WAVY) – Evonne and Damere Warren were supposed to grow up together, fated by birth to play, learn, and discover the world side-by-side, like siblings do.

But Evonne would never meet her little brother, and Damere would never know his big sister. The siblings were born just one year apart, and died one year apart. Now their father is accused of murdering them both.

A grand jury indicted DuWayne Warren, 26, on three counts of second-degree murder in Norfolk Circuit Court on Wednesday. Warren was previously charged with killing his 3-month-old son Damere and the baby's mother, 22-year-old Epifani Andrews, on Dec. 29, 2020. Prosecutors brought a third charge of second-degree murder against Warren Wednesday, accusing him of killing his 3-month-old daughter Evonne a year before beating her brother and mother to death in their Norfolk apartment.

Man charged in double homicide of woman and infant in Norfolk

10 On Your Side investigators first learned about Evonne's death in June when reviewing Damere and Andrews' autopsies. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reported that Andrews and Warren had another child who "died of suspicious circumstances" on Dec. 19, 2019, one year before Damere was killed. The Norfolk Police Department confirmed that they were investigating Evonne's case as an undetermined death.

The OCME determined that Evonne died of "suspected asphyxia," also known as suffocation. Evonne also suffered from blunt force trauma injuries to her body, which were healing when she died. The OCME did not determine what role those injuries may have played in her death. The OCME ruled her death as "undetermined."

Autopsies detail brutal deaths of baby, mother at Norfolk apartment

The OCME determined that Damere died of blunt force trauma injuries and may have been smothered to death. The OCME's report also found that Damere had extensive bruising and scarring on his body and several rib fractures that were in different stages of healing. A forensic anthropologist determined that the fractures were consistent with abuse over the course of his short life.



Epifani Andrews (Photo courtesy: Facebook)

The same forensic anthropologist who examined Damere's body in January 2021 also examined his older sister's body a year earlier. That forensic anthropologist reported "similar findings" from the examinations of both infants.

Andrews, who birthed and lost both of her children within one year, also suffered a tragic fate, allegedly at Warren's hands. The OCME reported that the mother was beaten extensively and was cut and stabbed 25 times. She and Damere's bodies were discovered by police in the living room of their 6th Bay Street apartment after neighbors called 911 and reported a domestic disturbance around 1 p.m. on Dec. 29, 2020.

Before his arrest, Warren issued an apology to Andrews and his family on Facebook. Although he didn't name Evonne or Damere, he referenced two children in his post:

"My babies I love yall I'm so sorry. I pray God takes care of them ... Piff I love you so much n [sic] I'm sorry for not being a better and loving father to our babies, may they RIP. I took everything from you and all I wanted to do is give you the world."

DUWAYNE WARREN VIA A FACEBOOK POST

"He is a sick individual", neighbor Misty McCormick told WAVY. She said you could often hear fighting coming from the apartment upstairs. "It seemed rather dangerous," she said.

McCormick and another neighbor, Sylvia Barksdale, both told WAVY that they were sickened by what happened and would like to see Warren pay with his life. "Because you taking away an innocent life, somebody that didn't get the say so in what they want to do with their lives," said Barksdale.

Knowing that the death penalty is no longer an option for punishment in Virginia as of this month McCormick said, "I wish Virginia didn't do away with it and I'll take whatever consequences might follow my words right now but anybody that sick, yea, they don't deserve to live."



<https://www.wtvq.com/father-charged-with-shooting-and-killing-his-child-wounding-another/>

October 26, 2020

HAZARD, KY

UPDATE: Case of Father Accused of Shooting Two of His Children Sent to Grand Jury

HAZARD, Ky. (WTVQ) – The high-profile case of a father accused of shooting two of his children, killing one, has been waived to a Perry County Grand Jury, according to the judge presiding over the case in district court.

The preliminary hearing for David Hampton was scheduled for Tuesday, October 27, but the judge says both sides in the case agreed in writing on Monday to send the case directly to the grand jury, leading to the cancellation of the preliminary hearing.

Hampton is accused of shooting and killing his two-year old daughter and wounding his 12-year old boy, who survived after being airlifted to a hospital in Tennessee, according to Kentucky State Police.

Investigators say the shootings happened inside the family's home on Montgomery Creek Road in Vicco on October 14, 2020.

KSP says the mother and another child were in the home at the time of the shootings, but they were not harmed.

The mother, who is a teacher in the Perry County school system, managed to get all three children out of the house and took them next door at her parents' house, where they were evacuated by KSP to Hazard Appalachian Regional Healthcare by ambulance. The toddler died at the hospital, according to State Police.

It's now up to a Perry County Grand Jury to determine if David Hampton should be indicted on criminal charges in the case.

Update: Friday, October 16, 2020:

VICCO, Ky. (WTVQ) – A GoFundMe page has been set up to help pay the funeral costs of a two-year old girl who Kentucky State Police say was shot and killed by her father earlier this week. For a link to the fundraising page, click [here](#).

Original story below from Wednesday, October 14, 2020:

VICCO, Ky. (WTVQ) – A father is accused of shooting two of his children, one died, the other was airlifted to a hospital, according to Kentucky State Police.

Investigators say it happened just before 10:30 a.m. Wednesday in the family's home on Montgomery Creek Road in Vicco in Perry County.

KSP says 36-year old David Hampton, of Vicco, shot two of his children. Investigators told the Lexington Herald-Leader they believe the shootings were premeditated.

According to the newspaper report, the mother and another child were in the home at the time of the shootings, but were not harmed.

State Police say the mother was able to get all three children out of the home to her parents' house next door where the injured children were evacuated by Troopers and rushed to Hazard ARH, where one of the children died. The newspaper reports the child was only two-years old.

The other child who was shot was airlifted to a hospital in Johnson City, Tennessee and was last listed in stable condition, according to KSP. The Hazard Herald reports the child is 12-years old and was shot in the neck.

Hampton was arrested and charged with murder-domestic violence, attempted murder and two counts of wanton endangerment, according to KSP.

He was taken to the Kentucky River Regional Jail in Hazard.

KSP Detective Josh Huff is leading the investigation.

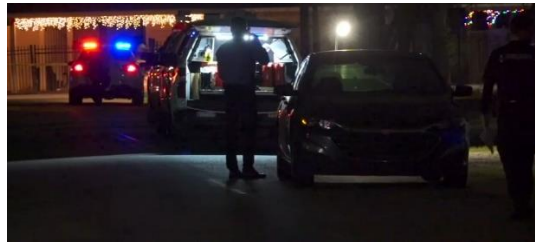


<https://www.the-sun.com/news/4348346/christmas-day-murder-suicide-dad-kills-mom/>

December 27, 2021
HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

HOLIDAY HORROR – Christmas Day Murder-Suicide Leaves 5 Children Orphaned After ‘Dad Killed Mom Before Shooting Self After Holiday Party’

AN apparent murder-suicide on Christmas Day has left five children orphaned after a dad reportedly killed his wife before shooting himself.



Authorities believe the Texas tragedy took place after the family attended a holiday party, though it's not completely clear what transpired just yet.

Cops believe a father killed his wife and himself after a family Christmas gathering

Police were called to a home in northeast Harris County, near Houston, and found Arsenio Gonzalez, 45, and Maria Gonzalez, 42, dead on their front lawn.

Maria reportedly had signs of blunt trauma while Arsenio had suffered from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Their five children, who range in age from seven to 16, were also found at the scene.

However, authorities don't believe the children witnessed what transpired between the parents.

The deaths appear to have occurred after a "family Christmas function," authorities said.

The children were unharmed and Child Protective Services is moving to place them with relatives, cops said.

Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez [confirmed the initial details](#) in a series of posts on Twitter.

"The couple had just returned home from a family Christmas function when the assault and shooting occurred," he wrote.

"Children Protective Services is assisting with placing the children with family."

No update had been provided about the status of the children as of Monday afternoon. Authorities are currently unsure exactly what transpired at the Texas home.



<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ohio-mom-pleads-guilty-execution-style-killings-8-members-family-n1278981>

September 11, 2021
COLUMBUS, OH

By *The Associated Press*

COLUMBUS, Ohio — An Ohio woman pleaded guilty Friday to helping plan the [killings of eight members of a family](#), becoming the second member of her own family to admit to a role in a shocking crime prosecutors say stemmed from a dispute over custody of her granddaughter.

[Angela Wagner](#), 50, pleaded guilty in southern Ohio's Pike County to conspiracy to commit aggravated murder, along with burglary, evidence tampering and other charges.

In exchange for the plea, prosecutors dropped aggravated murder charges against her and recommended that she serve a 30-year prison sentence. Her agreement to testify against other remaining defendants was also part of the deal, they said.

She didn't make any statements during the hearing.

Her husband and their two adult sons also were charged in the 2016 slayings of seven adults and a teenage boy from the [Rhoden family](#). Wagner's plea comes nearly five months after her son Edward "Jake" Wagner pleaded guilty to aggravated murder and other charges and agreed to testify against the other three in a deal that would help all four avoid potential death sentences.

George "Billy" Wagner III and George Wagner IV have pleaded not guilty.

The fatal shootings at three trailers and a camper near Piketon in April 2016 terrified residents in a stretch of rural Ohio and launched one of the state's most extensive criminal investigations, which led to the Wagners' arrest more than two years later.

The Wagners spent months planning the killings and targeted some of the victims, but "some sadly were killed because they happened to be there," said special prosecutor Angela Canepa.

Most of the victims were repeatedly shot in the head, and some showed signs of bruising. [Three young children at the scenes were unharmed.](#)

[The victims were](#) 40-year-old Christopher Rhoden Sr.; his ex-wife, 37-year-old Dana Rhoden; [their three children, 20-year-old Clarence "Frankie" Rhoden, 16-year-old Christopher Jr., and 19-year-old Hanna;](#) Clarence Rhoden's fiancée, 20-year-old Hannah Gilley; Christopher Rhoden Sr.'s brother, 44-year-old Kenneth Rhoden; and a cousin, 38-year-old Gary Rhoden.

[Prosecutors say the Wagner family planned the killings for months, motivated by a dispute over custody of the daughter Jake Wagner had with Hanna Rhoden.](#)

The Wagners used guns with homemade silencers, allowing them to kill their victims as they slept, according to the prosecutors.

Angela Wagner was fully aware of the plans and bought several items used to carry out the killings, including "phone jammers" that would have prevented the victims from calling for help, Canepa said.

She also forged custody documents and monitored some of the victims' social media accounts before the killings, Canepa said. Wagner approached prosecutors about a deal and gave them new information after her son pleaded guilty, Canepa said.

Jake Wagner pleaded guilty in April on the fifth anniversary of the slayings and said in court that he was "deeply and very sorry." He hasn't been sentenced, but his lawyer said he understood that he would spend his life in prison.

Christopher Rhoden Sr.'s brother, Tony Rhoden Sr., has said the family was grateful for the first plea as "some semblance of justice."

He also has sued the Wagners. That case is pending.

LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR REPORT

UNITED AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

CHALLENGES IN LOUISIANA’S EFFORTS TO ADDRESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



PERFORMANCE AUDIT SERVICES
ISSUED DECEMBER 16, 2021

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Under the provisions of state law, this report is a public document. A copy of this report has been submitted to the Governor, to the Attorney General, and to other public officials as required by state law. A copy of this report is available for public inspection at the Baton Rouge office of the Louisiana Legislative Auditor and online at www.lla.la.gov.

This document is produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor, State of Louisiana, Post Office Box 94397, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9397 in accordance with Louisiana Revised Statute 24:513. Five copies of this public document were produced at an approximate cost of \$7.75. This material was produced in accordance with the standards for state agencies established pursuant to R.S. 43:31. This report is available on the Legislative Auditor's website at www.lla.la.gov. When contacting the office, you may refer to Agency ID No. 9726 or Report ID No. 40210012 for additional information.

In compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance relative to this document, or any documents of the Legislative Auditor, please contact Jenifer Schaye, General Counsel, at 225-339-3800.



LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
MICHAEL J. "MIKE" WAGUESPACK, CPA

December 16, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Page Cortez,
President of the Senate
The Honorable Clay Schexnayder,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Senator Cortez and Representative Schexnayder:

This report provides the results of our performance audit examining how Louisiana is addressing the problem of domestic violence. The purpose of the audit was to identify challenges the state faces in its efforts.

Overall, we found Louisiana faces multiple challenges, including gaps in services for victims, insufficient and inflexible funding, inconsistent implementation of strategies to protect victims, lack of oversight for intervention programs for perpetrators, and lack of training for certain entities involved in addressing domestic violence.

We found Louisiana does not have enough domestic violence shelter beds and support services to meet the needs of all victims. For example, central Louisiana has no domestic violence shelter, and shelters across the state had an average of 2,659 unmet requests per year. In addition, only 10 percent of domestic violence funding comes from state sources in Louisiana, unlike other states. Service delivery for domestic violence victims could be improved with more funding, consistent funding levels, and more flexibility in how funds can be spent.

We also found that laws intended to protect victims, such as the issuance of protective orders, are not consistently implemented across the state. For example, protective orders may not always be served to abusers for a variety of reasons, and according to the Supreme Court and sheriffs, not all sheriff's offices submitted proof of service to the Louisiana Protective Order Registry, as required by state law. We found, too, that not all sheriff's offices have developed policies and procedures for the firearm relinquishment process, as required by state law.

In addition, while state law requires domestic violence training for law enforcement, others – such as judges and district attorneys – are not required to have training. We found as well that the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement has not completed a domestic violence awareness training program required for law enforcement officers. Because domestic violence is

The Honorable Patrick Page Cortez,
President of the Senate
The Honorable Clay Schexnayder,
Speaker of the House of Representatives
December 16, 2021
Page 2

a complicated, dynamic issue, education on current best practices could improve how the judicial branch and law enforcement protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

We also found that intervention programs aimed at perpetrators have no oversight or consistency across the state because no entity is responsible for monitoring these programs. Nor does the state mandate that intervention programs follow standards that would help ensure consistency and accountability.

Additionally, although state law requires that public schools provide education on dating violence for students and employees, we found not all public schools meet these requirements. Awareness efforts in public schools could be strengthened to help better identify and prevent domestic violence incidents.

The report contains our findings, conclusions, and recommendations. I hope this report will benefit you in your legislative decision-making process.

We would like to express our appreciation to the numerous stakeholders involved in domestic violence prevention for their assistance during this audit.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Waguespack', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael J. "Mike" Waguespack, CPA
Legislative Auditor

MJW/aa

DOMESTICVIOLENCE

Louisiana Legislative Auditor

Michael J. “Mike” Waguespack, CPA



Challenges in Louisiana’s Efforts to Address Domestic Violence

December 2021

Audit Control # 40210012

Introduction

We reviewed challenges Louisiana faces in its efforts to address domestic violence.¹ We conducted this audit because, in 2017, Louisiana had the second-highest rate of female homicide in the nation and the fifth-highest in 2018,² with approximately 60% of female homicide victims killed by intimate partners in each year. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated domestic violence, as abuse victims were often trapped in homes with their abusers during stressful times caused by self-isolation, quarantine measures, and job loss. For instance, according to the East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney, domestic violence-related deaths in East Baton Rouge Parish increased 375%, from four deaths in 2019 to 19 in 2020.³

Domestic violence, sometimes called intimate partner violence, is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.

Source: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Victims of domestic abuse come from all backgrounds, communities, education levels, economic levels, ethnicities, and religions. Abusers use coercive control that may include a combination of abusive tactics, such as isolation, degradation, manipulation, physical and sexual abuse, threats, and punishment.⁴ Domestic violence also affects children, as exposure to violent and hostile environments have long-term effects, such as greater risks for serious health problems, depression, substance abuse, tobacco use, and unintended pregnancies. Children who witness domestic violence are also three times as likely as their peers to engage in violent behavior.⁵

Multiple entities in Louisiana are involved in addressing domestic violence. For example, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement (LCLE) administer federal grants to service providers; law enforcement responds to calls and is often the first point of contact in domestic violence cases; and the judicial system prosecutes cases and issues protective orders. In addition, the Domestic Violence Prevention

¹ For this report we are using the term domestic violence to represent domestic violence, domestic abuse, intimate partner violence, family violence, dating violence, and similar terms.

² Violence Policy Center, [“When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2017 Data,” September 2019](#) and [“When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2018 Data,” September 2020](#)

³ [“Domestic Violence Annual Report 2020,” Hillar C. Moore, III, East Baton Rouge District Attorney’s Office](#)











⁴ [“Who is Doing What to Whom? Determining the Core Aggressor in Relationships where Domestic Violence Exists,” National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)

⁵ [“Domestic Violence and Children,” National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#); [“Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 2014](#)

Commission,⁶ created in August 2014, has several responsibilities, including assisting local and state leaders in developing and coordinating domestic violence programs, conducting a continuing comprehensive review of domestic violence programs to identify gaps in services, and developing a statewide needs assessment. Louisiana also has a domestic violence coalition, the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (LCADV), which is the federally-designated statewide coalition of shelters, non-residential programs, and individuals working to end domestic violence. For a description of each of the entities involved with domestic violence, see Appendix C.

Victims of domestic violence may receive services from various entities. LCADV and local domestic violence shelter providers maintain 24-hour crisis hotlines. Shelters provide emergency housing and other services, such as crisis intervention, counseling, legal intervention, transportation, and services for children. Entities such as shelters, law enforcement, and district attorneys also link victims with additional available services. Additionally, some perpetrators receive domestic violence intervention programming that can be ordered by the courts. Exhibit 1 provides an overview of victim services and what entities may provide them.

Exhibit 1 Examples of Domestic Violence Victim Services

	24-hour hotlines – operated by LCADV and local domestic violence shelter providers		Legal advocacy, including help with filing protective orders and linking to legal service – provided by shelters and district attorneys
	Immediate assistance, such as meals, clothing, medical care, supplies for children – provided by shelters and law enforcement		Employment assistance, including helping find employment or job training – provided by shelters
	Emergency and transitional housing, including assistance with utility bills or deposits – provided by shelters		Transportation, such as to work, to move out, or to other services – provided by shelters
	Crisis intervention and group counseling – provided by shelters		Linkage to service providers, such as food stamps or shelter providers – provided by law enforcement, district attorneys, shelters
	Services for children, including counseling, child care assistance, assistance with school supplies or tutoring – provided by shelters		Domestic violence awareness training – provided by shelter providers, law enforcement agencies, district attorneys

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information provided by DCFS and other stakeholders.

For this review, we interviewed multiple stakeholders, including domestic violence service providers, LCADV, DCFS, LCLE, the Louisiana Department of Health, law enforcement entities, judicial branch entities, and legislators. In addition, we reviewed national best practices and Louisiana-specific reports. We also surveyed the domestic violence coalitions in each state, all 16 domestic violence shelter providers in the state, and 18 school systems in the state.

The objective of this audit was:

⁶ Louisiana Revised Statute (R.S.) 46:2145

To identify challenges Louisiana faces in its efforts to address domestic violence.

Our results are summarized on the next page and discussed in detail throughout the remainder of the report. Appendix A contains LCLE management's response and other stakeholder responses, and Appendix B contains our scope and methodology. Appendix C describes the entities involved with domestic violence issues across the state, and Appendix D shows the number of individuals who received shelter- and non-shelter-based services. In addition, Appendix E summarizes the types of federal and state funding sources for domestic violence services, and Appendix F describes the different types of protective orders issued in Louisiana.

Objective: To identify challenges Louisiana faces in its efforts to address domestic violence.

Overall, we found that Louisiana faces multiple challenges in its efforts to address domestic violence. These challenges include gaps in services for victims, insufficient and inflexible funding, strategies to protect victims not being consistently implemented, lack of oversight for intervention programs for perpetrators, and lack of training for certain entities involved in addressing domestic violence. Specifically, we found the following:

- **Lack of domestic violence shelter beds and support services to meet the needs of all victims is an ongoing challenge in Louisiana.** More funding, consistent funding levels, and more flexibility in how funds can be spent could help improve service delivery to victims. For example, there is no domestic violence shelter in central Louisiana, and shelters across Louisiana had an average of 2,659 unmet requests for shelter per year during federal fiscal years 2015 through 2020. In addition, unlike other states, only 10% of domestic violence funding comes from state sources.
- **State laws intended to protect victims, such as the issuance of protective orders, are not consistently implemented across the state.** For example, protective orders may not always be served to abusers for a variety of reasons, and according to the Supreme Court and sheriffs, not all sheriff's offices submitted proof of service to the Louisiana Protective Order Registry (LPOR), as required by state law. In addition, not all sheriff's offices have developed policies and procedures for the firearm relinquishment process as required by law.
- **While state law requires law enforcement training on domestic violence, other entities involved in addressing domestic violence are not required to have such training. For example, there is no requirement for judges and district attorneys to receive domestic violence training.** In addition, LCLE has not completed a domestic violence awareness training program required by state law for law enforcement officers. Because domestic violence is a complicated, dynamic issue, education on current best practices could improve how the judicial branch and law enforcement protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Intervention programs for perpetrators, which aim to protect victims and prevent future abuse, have no oversight or consistency across the state.** Unlike domestic violence shelters, which must follow standards and be inspected by DCFS, Louisiana has no entity responsible for oversight and monitoring of intervention programs for perpetrators of domestic violence and does not mandate that these programs follow standards that would help ensure consistency and accountability.
- **Awareness efforts in public schools could be strengthened to better identify and prevent domestic violence incidents.** Although state law requires that public schools provide education on dating violence for students and employees, not all

Louisiana public schools meet these requirements. As a result, all students may not receive dating violence education or learn how to report instances of dating violence.

Our findings and our recommendations are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

Lack of domestic violence shelter beds and support services to meet the needs of all victims is an ongoing challenge in Louisiana. More funding, consistent funding levels, and more flexibility in how funds can be spent could help improve service delivery to victims.

In fiscal year 2020, Louisiana had 16 domestic violence shelters, with a total of 386 shelter beds across the state, and 36 associated offices that offered non-shelter services to victims, such as advocacy, counseling, and crisis intervention.⁷ Emergency services, such as safe housing, and supportive services that assist in gaining independence are important because the time immediately following someone leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous. Many victims have no support system or financial resources and fear homelessness, losing custody of their children, or additional threats from their abuser.⁸ In federal fiscal year 2020, Louisiana domestic violence providers served 2,212 individuals through shelter-based services and 12,031 individuals through non-shelter-based services. Appendix D shows the number of individuals served through shelter-based services and non-shelter-based services.

According to Amnesty International's 2019 report on domestic violence in Louisiana, there is a high demand for limited services, as shelters are often at capacity, services are over-subscribed, and providers have to turn people away every day.

Source: ["Fragmented and Unequal: A Justice System that Fails Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Louisiana, USA," Amnesty International, October 24, 2019](#)

Gaps in victim services available, such as emergency shelter beds, transportation, housing, and legal advocacy, make it difficult for domestic violence service providers to meet the needs of all victims. For example, there are not enough shelter beds, as domestic violence shelters had an average of 2,659 unmet requests for shelter beds per year during federal fiscal years 2015 through 2020.⁹ In addition to shelter services, domestic violence service providers offer counseling for victims; support programs that assist victims in obtaining needed medical, legal, and other services; and educational programs to increase community awareness of domestic violence. Stakeholders, including shelter providers, consistently stated that housing and

⁷ Domestic violence offices include those open full time, part time, or by appointment that contract with DCFS and are funded, at least in part, through Family Violence Prevention and Services Act and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds.

⁸ ["Fragmented and Unequal: A Justice System that Fails Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Louisiana, USA," Amnesty International, October 24, 2019](#)

⁹ According to [LCADV's 2017 Statewide Needs Assessment](#), the quantity of emergency shelter beds is insufficient to meet the existing needs for immediate shelter.

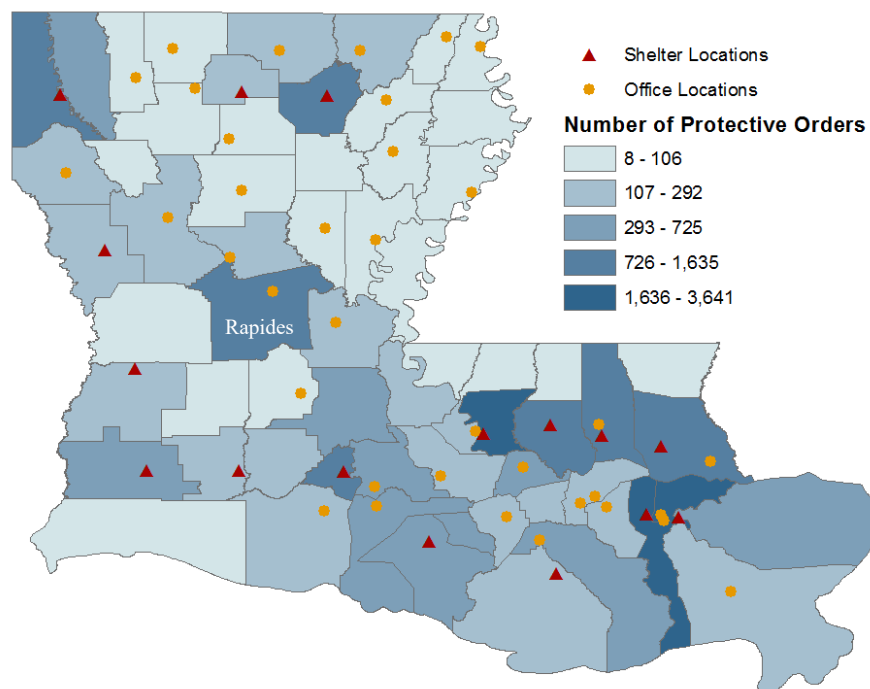
transportation are significant gaps in domestic violence services available. In our survey of domestic violence shelter providers, 14 (87.5%) of 16 providers stated that housing for victims is a challenge in addressing domestic violence. In addition, 11 (68.8%) stated transportation for victims and legal advocacy for victims are challenges.

A domestic violence program provider can serve multiple parishes, which can be challenging for victims to access services, especially in rural areas and for victims who lack transportation. For example, one program provider serves 12 parishes, but only one of these parishes has a shelter. While this program provider also has 10 satellite offices, the offices are often shared spaces open only one day per week. In addition, there are no domestic violence shelters in central Louisiana, even though Rapides parish had 849 protective orders issued in the parish in calendar year 2020, the tenth-highest number in the state. Exhibit 2 shows the number of protective orders by parish and the locations of domestic violence shelters and offices for calendar year 2020.

“Finding safe housing for the women and their children as well as stable financial support once they leave our shelters is an ongoing concern. Affordable, safe housing is hard to find in the rural areas we serve and a majority of the time we have to send survivors to other areas.”

Source: Legislative auditor domestic violence shelter provider survey, July 2021

Exhibit 2
Number of Protective Orders by Parish and Domestic Violence Shelter and Provider Office Locations
Calendar Year 2020



Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information provided by the Louisiana Protective Order Registry and based on survey responses from all 16 domestic violence shelter providers.

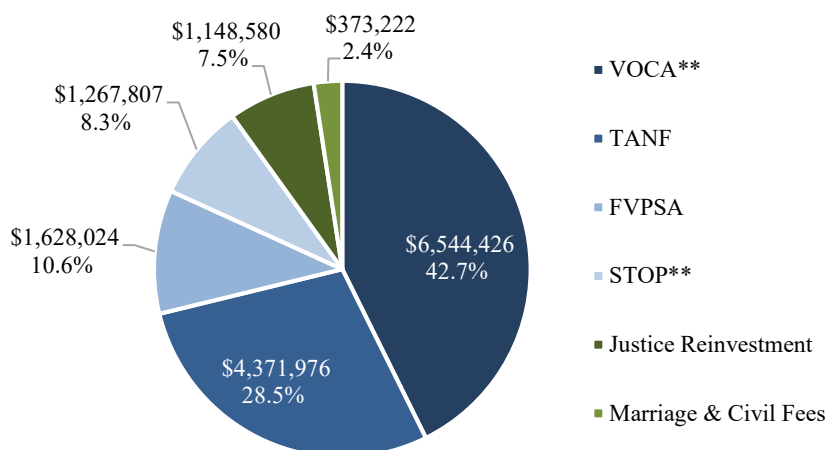
Domestic violence stakeholders and survey responses from shelters stated that funding is a major challenge in providing services to victims of domestic violence, including the need for more funding, consistent funding levels, and more flexibility in spending funds. DCFS contracts with shelter providers through its Family Violence Prevention and Intervention Program that is funded through federal grants. These domestic violence shelters are funded by a combination of federal grants (administered by DCFS and/or LCLE), state funds, local funds, and private funds. In addition, other entities, such as law enforcement agencies, district attorney offices, and non-profit organizations receive federal grants, administered through LCLE, for domestic violence initiatives. Stakeholders noted three challenges in providing victim services with domestic violence funding:

- *A need for more funding.* Domestic violence service providers stated that it is hard to pay its employees, often whom provide direct victim services, a competitive, living wage. For example, combined amounts from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) grants going to domestic violence services have remained consistent at \$6 million since 2011. However, according to DCFS, this amount will increase to \$7 million for fiscal years 2021 and 2022.
- *A need for more predictable funding.* Federal grants, particularly Victims of Crime Act Program (VOCA), fluctuate from year to year, making it difficult for providers to maintain budgets and plan for future years. For example, VOCA funding for domestic violence increased 79.1%, from \$7.6 million in federal fiscal year 2017 to \$13.6 million in federal fiscal year 2018, but then decreased 38% in federal fiscal year 2019 to \$8.4 million.
- *A need for more flexible funding.* Federal grants often have limitations on how dollars can be spent. For example, FVPSA caps administrative costs at 5%; however, the grant also has administrative requirements, such as data collection and monthly reporting. In addition, VOCA and STOP Violence Against Women (STOP) funds cannot be used to build new shelter facilities.

In Louisiana, only 10% of domestic violence funding comes from state sources, which can be more flexible and predictable than the approximately 90% of funding that comes from federal grants. As shown in Exhibit 3 on the next page, approximately \$13.8 million (90.1%) of the \$15.3 million in annual domestic violence funding administered by the state came from federal grants in 2020. While domestic violence shelter providers may secure funding from local governments, non-profit organizations, and private donors, the majority of their budgets come from federal grants. According to our survey of domestic violence shelter providers, an average of approximately 40.6% of their budgets are funded through federal FVPSA and TANF grants, while an average of approximately 28.6% of their budgets are funded through federal VOCA and STOP grants. Other states often use a combination of state general funds and dedicated fees, and some states dedicate more state funds to domestic violence services than Louisiana. State funds can be more flexible and predictable than federal grants. For example, beginning in 2020, funds from the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) have been awarded for flexible housing assistance for domestic violence victims.

Appendix E summarizes the types of federal and state funding sources for domestic violence services received from 2016 through 2020.

Exhibit 3
2020 Domestic Violence Funding*



*Based on state or federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020

**Estimated totals based on historical average percent of federal award spent on domestic violence. LCLE has not yet disbursed all of the FFY 2020 grant award amounts.

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information from LCLE and DCFS.

We surveyed other state domestic violence coalitions, and seven (77.8%) of those nine states reported having state funds dedicated to domestic violence services, with approximately 10% to 70% of domestic violence services funding coming from state funds.¹⁰ In addition, other states use state funds for domestic violence services; for example, \$4.5 million (57.2%) of Utah's \$7.9 million in services funding was from state general fund dollars in fiscal year 2020, and \$9.8 million (84.5%) of New Mexico's \$11.6 million services budget was from state general funds in fiscal year 2017. Georgia also allocates state funds for domestic violence services, which has provided the state with flexibility to pay for expenses that federal grants do not cover, such as administrative costs including salaries for executive directors and housing assistance such as mortgage payments for victims.

Matter for Legislative Consideration 1: The legislature may wish to consider more consistent and flexible funding for programs that address domestic violence so that providers are better able to address gaps in services.

¹⁰ Florida, Illinois, Maine, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming

State laws intended to protect victims, such as the issuance of protective orders, are not consistently implemented across the state. For example, protective orders may not always be served to abusers for a variety of reasons, and according to the Supreme Court and sheriffs, not all sheriff's offices submitted proof of service to the Louisiana Protective Order Registry (LPOR),¹¹ as required by state law. In addition, not all sheriff's offices have developed policies and procedures for the firearm relinquishment process as required by law.

State laws related to protective orders and the relinquishment of firearms are intended to help protect victims. Protective orders are issued by judges and require one person to stay away from another person, with the intent to prevent abuse and enhance safety of the individual seeking protection.¹² While protective orders cannot guarantee victim safety, research has shown that these orders generally deter repeated incidents of physical abuse.¹³ Serving a protective order to the individual whom the order is against is an important component of holding perpetrators accountable and provides legal ramifications if the perpetrator violates the order.

Since 1996, federal law prohibits individuals from possessing a firearm if they have a final protective order against them¹⁴ or have been convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor. In 2014, Louisiana passed a similar state law that prohibits firearm possession due to domestic violence.¹⁵ Research¹⁶ indicates that an abuser with access to a gun is five to eight times more likely to kill their female victim. According to the Violence Policy Center, in 2018, firearms were the weapon most commonly used by males to murder women, and the number of women shot and killed by intimate partners was four times higher than the total number murdered by male strangers using all weapons combined.¹⁷ Evidence also indicates that firearm possession prohibitions are effective in reducing domestic violence homicide rates.¹⁸ Ensuring that firearm possession prohibitions are consistently enforced is important, as access to firearms makes domestic violence situations significantly more dangerous.

¹¹ The Louisiana Protective Order Registry (LPOR) is a statewide registry established by R.S. 46:2136.2 for temporary restraining orders, protective orders, preliminary injunctions, permanent injunctions, and court-approved consent agreements that are issued to prevent domestic abuse.

¹² R.S. 46:2135 and 46:2136

¹³ [University of New Hampshire Carsey Institute, "Civil Protective Orders Effective in Stopping or Reducing Partner Violence," Spring 2011](#)

¹⁴ According to 18 USCA 922, an individual is prohibited from possessing a firearm if they have a final order of protection against him/her that meets certain requirements; have been convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor; or have been convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year.

¹⁵ Act 195 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session

¹⁶ ["Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study," American Journal of Public Health, August 2003](#); ["Guns and Violence Against Women: America's Uniquely Lethal Intimate Partner Violence Problem," Everytown for Gun Safety, April 2021](#)

¹⁷ ["When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2018 Homicide Data," Violence Policy Center, September 2020](#)

¹⁸ ["Domestic Violence and Firearms: Research on Statutory Interventions," Battered Women's Justice Project, April M. Zeoli, November 2018](#)

According to stakeholders, protective orders are not always served to abusers for a variety of reasons. In addition, according to the Supreme Court and sheriffs, not all sheriff's offices have been sending proof of service to LPOR as required by law.¹⁹ In Louisiana, there are several types of protective orders that victims can petition a judge to order. Temporary restraining orders are issued at the beginning phase of a victim getting court-ordered protection. These orders are issued before a formal court hearing and are intended to last until the court hearing, usually 21 days. Protective orders are granted for a certain time period by a judge after a formal hearing or trial. These orders may include various provisions, such as firearm prohibitions, and some provisions may never expire. After a judge issues an order, the parish's sheriff's office physically serves the order to the individual whom the order is against. Once served, state law requires sheriff's offices to transmit proof of service to LPOR, a statewide registry for temporary restraining orders, protective orders, preliminary injunctions, permanent injunctions, and court-approved consent agreements that are issued to prevent domestic abuse and to aid law enforcement, prosecutors, and the courts in handling such matters. See Appendix F for information on the different types of protective orders issued in Louisiana.

In the 2018 Regular Legislative Session, the legislature passed a bill that requires sheriff's offices to submit proof of service to LPOR.²⁰ According to legislative testimony, the impetus for the bill came from victims and advocates reporting that law enforcement could not always enforce protective orders because they could not always verify proof of service. However, we found that not all sheriff's offices are submitting proof of service to LPOR, and, as a result, the registry does not contain all orders served statewide.²¹ According to the Louisiana Supreme Court, which administers LPOR, it is aware that some sheriff's offices are not sending proof of service to LPOR and has sent reminders to these offices. Inputting proof of service into LPOR is important, as stakeholders use the database to look up protective orders and whether they have been served and are thus enforceable. Serving temporary restraining orders, for example, is particularly important because they not enforceable unless they are served to the abuser, and if not served, the court hearing for a final protective order may be dismissed. Temporary restraining orders are issued during one of the most volatile and dangerous times in a domestic violence case, which is when the victim leaves the abuser.

There are many reasons why law enforcement may not be able to successfully serve a protective order, such as the individual fleeing or intentionally evading service, dismissal of charges, the expiration of temporary orders, or inefficient processes between agencies. For example, some clerks of court mail protective order paperwork to sheriff's offices, which can be time consuming. Act 317 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session amended state law to allow protective orders to be transmitted electronically, such as through fax or email, which should make transmitting orders more efficient and timelier. One sheriff's office stated that sometimes by the time it receives temporary restraining order paperwork, the order is already expired and cannot be served. The Louisiana Sheriffs' Association is currently working with the Supreme Court to improve the process for reporting to LPOR and the overall completeness and accuracy of the registry. In addition, while the Supreme Court collects information on the total number of

¹⁹ Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure, Article 1292, which went into effect in August 2018

²⁰ House Bill 207 of the 2018 Regular Legislative Session

²¹ According to the Louisiana Sheriffs' Associations, some sheriff's offices were sending proof of service to clerks of court rather than to LPOR.

protective orders by parish and the total number served in LPOR, no one uses this data to monitor whether all orders are served or as a way to identify best practices to improve the number of orders served successfully.

Louisiana has strong laws to prohibit certain individuals from possessing firearms; however, these laws may not always be enforced across the state. For example, not all sheriff's offices have developed policies and procedures for the firearm relinquishment process as required by law.

Act 367 of the 2018 Regular Legislative Session mandates that individuals prohibited from possessing firearms due to a domestic violence conviction or protective order must transfer all firearms to the sheriff within 48 hours after the judge's order.²² Individuals have the option of surrendering their firearms to the sheriff's office, transferring them to a third party, or legally selling them. The sheriff of each parish is responsible for oversight of firearm transfers in their parish.²³ In addition, state law mandates that the sheriff, clerk of court, and district attorney of each parish shall develop forms, policies, and procedures regarding firearm transfers no later than January 1, 2019.

Multiple stakeholders stated that the way judges and prosecutors handle protective orders and domestic violence crimes can be inconsistent. For example, several stakeholders said that district attorneys often plead down cases to a lesser charge that does not prohibit firearm possession, and that judges in some areas are hesitant to grant protective orders if the accused is a hunter because they do not want to make them relinquish their firearms.

Source: LLA interviews with domestic violence stakeholders, April through July 2021

We contacted 16 sheriffs across the state²⁴ and found that, while most sheriffs had firearm relinquishment forms, they did not always have policies and procedures on how to receive or transfer firearms. Specifically, five (31.3%) provided copies of the policy, five (31.3%) stated they had policies but did not provide copies, four (25.0%) did not have policies, and two (12.5%) were unsure whether they had policies. In addition, the Louisiana Domestic Violence Prevention Commission recommended in its 2019 Annual Report that data be collected and analyzed statewide to monitor the consistent implementation of the firearm transfer law. However, we found that not all sheriff's offices kept statistics regarding the number of firearms they had collected or assisted in transferring or selling. Of those that did keep statistics, the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office reported 400 relinquishments during 2020 and 2021, Rapides Sheriff's Office reported approximately 46 relinquishments since 2018, and Ascension reported 79 relinquishments during 2019 through 2021.

State law **prohibits the possession of a firearm** if someone:

- has a final protective order against them and there is a believable threat to the physical safety of a family/ household member or dating partner, and the defendant was notified about the state and federal firearm laws
- has been convicted of domestic abuse battery, 2nd offense battery of a dating partner, or a crime of violence, including domestic abuse aggravated assault
- violated a protective order if the violation involves battery or a crime of violence

Source: R.S. 46:2136.3 and 14:95.1

²² If an individual does not have any firearms, they sign a form stating they do not possess any firearms.

²³ Title XXXV of the LA Code of Criminal Procedure, Articles 1001 - 1004

²⁴ We selected a cross-section of sheriff's offices across the state, including urban and rural parishes, those with the highest numbers of protective orders, and those with the fewest protective orders.

The Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office (LPSO) has led the way in developing thorough processes to enforce firearm relinquishment laws. According to LPSO, Lafourche Parish has had no domestic homicides at the hands of an abuser since 2009. LPSO works closely with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to address federal firearm prohibitions and has notified local gun dealerships of the process of reporting prohibited individuals when they attempt to purchase a firearm.

Matter for Legislative Consideration 2: The legislature may wish to urge the Supreme Court to work with the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission to use the data collected in the Louisiana Protective Order Registry to identify best practices and strategies to improve the number of protective orders successfully served.

Matter for Legislative Consideration 3: The legislature may wish to consider a mechanism to ensure that the sheriffs in each parish comply with state law requirements in the Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure, Article 1292 regarding transmitting proof of serving a protective order to LPOR.

Matter for Legislative Consideration 4: The legislature may wish to consider a mechanism to ensure that the sheriffs in each parish comply with state law requirements in Title XXXV of the Louisiana Code of Criminal Procedure, Articles 1001 – 1004 regarding the relinquishments of firearms.

While state law requires law enforcement training on domestic violence, other entities involved in addressing domestic violence are not required to have such training. For example, there is no requirement for judges and district attorneys to receive domestic violence training. In addition, LCLE has not completed a domestic violence awareness training program required by state law for law enforcement officers.

Training on evidence-based practices in responding to domestic violence is important for both law enforcement and the judicial branch, as both entities are heavily involved in domestic violence cases. Current best practices include victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches that aim to minimize additional trauma associated with the criminal justice process by providing support and empowering victims. However, while state law requires that law enforcement receive training on domestic violence, not all entities involved in addressing domestic violence, such as judges and district attorneys, are required to have such training.

State law requires the Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (POST)²⁵ to develop a domestic violence awareness training program that each officer must complete on and after July 1, 2018; however, LCLE has not yet completed this training program. Act 495 of the 2018 Regular Legislative Session amended state law²⁶ to require POST to develop a domestic violence awareness training program to include seven specific areas (see text box), and that each peace officer²⁷ shall complete the program. The law also directs POST to develop rules for the training program and create and maintain a list of peace officers who have successfully completed it. According to LCLE, law enforcement officers also receive at least seven hours of domestic violence training as part of the 496 minimum basic training hours required, and they must complete a minimum of 20 hours of in-service training hours annually, which may or may not include domestic violence training.

State law requires that a **domestic violence awareness training program** include all of the following:

1. Dynamics of domestic violence
2. Predominant aggressor determination
3. Neurobiology of trauma and implications for victim communication
4. Strangulation response and investigation methods
5. Evidence-based investigation methods
6. Protection order enforcement and the Louisiana Protective Order Registry
7. Applicable state and federal domestic violence laws

Source: R.S. 40:2405.8(E)

When asked what the state's biggest challenges or gaps are in addressing domestic violence, one domestic violence shelter/service provider responded, "Consistent training for law enforcement. We work in two separate parishes with completely different responses and protocols for domestic violence."

Source: Legislative auditor survey of domestic violence shelters/service providers, July 2021

LCLE has not yet completed a domestic violence awareness training program as required by Act 495. While LCLE has created some domestic violence course content such as a module on the dynamics of domestic violence and a module on the protective order registry, this content does not include all of the topics required by state law. For example, the training does not include strangulation or implications for victim communication. In addition, according to LCLE, the neurobiology of trauma is included in sexual assault in-service training, but not as part of the domestic violence modules. As

LCLE has not completed the development of a domestic violence awareness training program, it has not developed a process to maintain a list of all law enforcement officers who have completed the training program as required by law. Domestic violence training is important for law enforcement, as domestic violence calls are common and responding can be dangerous for law enforcement officers. In addition, law enforcement is often the first point of contact in domestic violence cases, arriving in emergency situations, making arrests, and collecting evidence.

²⁵ LCLE carries out the staff functions of POST. POST is responsible for developing and evaluating the curriculum of mandatory basic training courses, developing and monitoring ongoing in-service training courses, firearms training, and other advanced training for law enforcement agencies in the state.

²⁶ R.S. 40:2405.8

²⁷ In addition to state and local law enforcement agencies, peace officers also include sheriffs' deputies responsible for inmates, military police officers within the state Military Department, security personnel employed by the state Supreme Court, and security personnel employed by a state court of appeal. (R.S. 40:2402).

According to LCLE, funding has been a challenge in creating a domestic violence awareness training program. While the legislation included a fiscal note that estimated a cost of \$28,000 to develop and implement an interactive video training module, the legislature did not allocate the funds to cover the cost. LCLE funds training initiatives through residual or unspent VOCA grants and received \$90,288, including a \$18,250 match, for domestic violence training during fiscal years 2017 through 2019. According to LCLE, the funding to develop the remaining domestic violence modules was approved in June 2021.

While judges and district attorneys may attend domestic violence training, state law does not require such training for these entities. The Louisiana Supreme Court and the Louisiana District Attorney's Association provide training on domestic violence for judges and district attorneys, funded through STOP and VOCA grants. However, these trainings are not mandatory, and judges and district attorney staff may choose not to participate. In addition, a thorough understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence is important for judges, as they may encounter domestic violence cases in a variety of situations, such as protective order requests, child custody cases, or criminal cases. One judge we spoke with stated that, in a given week, 30% to 50% of the cases he sees are related to domestic violence.

Louisiana does not have a standardized policy on court handling of domestic violence cases, nor any best practice guidelines for judges. Not requiring domestic violence training or not having standard guidance or policies for judges and district attorneys can lead to court officials interpreting the law in different ways, often leading to inconsistent applications of the law which can affect victim safety.

Source: "Fragmented and Unequal: A Justice System that Fails Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Louisiana, USA," Amnesty International, October 24, 2019

The development of comprehensive guidance for judges regarding domestic violence is one way to improve consistent applications of the law and may improve victim safety. For example, Louisiana Appleseed,²⁸ in conjunction with the Louisiana Bar Foundation, created a domestic abuse summary document for judges that summarizes key domestic violence related laws. In addition, the Louisiana Supreme Court provides the judiciary a LPOR Quick Reference Guide that outlines Louisiana's civil domestic abuse, dating violence, stalking and sexual assault laws, including LPOR mandatory forms and reference to firearm prohibitions. In addition, the Louisiana District Attorney's Association maintains a detailed domestic violence prosecution manual that outlines best practices for victim-centered prosecution. Other states have developed more comprehensive guides for domestic violence for judges. For example, the Supreme Court of Washington State developed an in-depth domestic violence bench guide for education in the area of domestic violence for judges and other court personnel. In 2021, the Louisiana Supreme Court developed a similar guide for juvenile judges that includes guidance for child abuse cases, but not for domestic violence.²⁹ In its 2019 Annual Report, the Louisiana Domestic Violence and Prevention Commission stated that consistent implementation of the law is important for both reducing firearm-related domestic violence homicides and implementation of Gwen's Law.³⁰

²⁸ Louisiana Appleseed is part of a national network of 16 public interest law centers.

²⁹ ["Louisiana Child in Need of Care Benchbook for Juvenile Judges," Louisiana Supreme Court, Louisiana Judicial College, and Pelican Center for Children and Families, 2021](#)

³⁰ Louisiana Code of Criminal Procedure Article 313, referred to as "Gwen's Law," allows for a contradictory bail hearing prior to setting bail for a person charged with domestic violence-related crimes.

Going forward, the Commission intends to create a statewide teaching protocol to address the disparity in case handling of Gwen's Law.

Stakeholders we interviewed or surveyed also expressed the need for domestic violence training for judges, district attorneys, and law enforcement. Our survey of domestic violence shelter providers found 15 (93.8%) of 16 respondents stated that domestic violence training for law enforcement is a challenge for the state to address domestic violence; 14 (87.5%) reported domestic violence training for judges as a challenge; and 11 (68.8%) reported that training for district attorneys as a challenge. In addition, 13 (81.3%) providers reported that in their area, training for judges was not sufficient, and 11 (68.8%) stated that training for district attorneys and law enforcement was not sufficient.

Matter for Legislative Consideration 5: The legislature may wish to urge the Louisiana Supreme Court or another entity to create in-depth domestic violence guidance for judges.

Recommendation 1: POST should complete a domestic violence awareness training program to include all requirements in state law.

Summary of Management's Response: LCLE disagrees with this recommendation and states that, although state law required it to complete a Domestic Violence Awareness Training Program, the mandate was unfunded. LCLE was able to utilize other sources of funding and is in the process of completing the training program. See Appendix A for management's full response.

Recommendation 2: POST should develop a process to maintain a list of all law enforcement officers who complete the domestic violence awareness training program as required by state law.

Summary of Management's Response: LCLE disagrees with this recommendation and states that POST currently has the ability to maintain a list manually and is in the process of modifying its ability to electronically track all courses within a curriculum. POST is able to verify officers have completed statutorily-required training. See Appendix A for management's full response.

Intervention programs for perpetrators, which aim to protect victims and prevent future abuse, have no oversight or consistency across the state. Unlike domestic violence shelters, which must follow standards and be inspected by DCFS, Louisiana has no entity responsible for oversight and monitoring of intervention programs for perpetrators of domestic violence and does not mandate that these programs follow standards that would help ensure consistency and accountability.

Programs designed for perpetrators of domestic violence are specialized for individuals who have committed domestic violence and typically use group education or intervention models to achieve the goals of victim safety and offender accountability.³¹ There are various domestic abuse intervention program (DAIP) models across the nation, also called “batterer intervention programs,” including the nationally-recognized Duluth Model. In Louisiana, a judge can order the completion of a DAIP, and participants are required to pay for the cost of the programming unless the court determines inability to pay. According to our survey of domestic violence shelters and service providers, 12 (75.0%) of 16 stated that batterer intervention programming (or DAIPs) is a challenge the state faces in addressing domestic violence, and LCADV confirms there is no infrastructure to ensure offender accountability for DAIPs.

A court-monitored domestic abuse intervention program is a program comprised of a minimum of weekly in-person sessions occurring over 26 weeks that follows a model designed specifically for perpetrators of domestic abuse. The offender's progress in the program shall be monitored by the court.

Source: R.S. 14:35.3(B)(3)

DAIPs in Louisiana are not mandated to follow minimum program standards. According to the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, standards are important for promoting consistency amongst DAIPs and for helping hold programs accountable. In 1997, LCADV developed state standards for DAIPs; however, these standards have never been codified and DAIPs are not required to implement them. Conversely, in our survey of domestic violence coalitions in other states, six (60%) of 10 states reported having DAIP standards. Nationwide DAIP standards include best practices for intervention methods, as well as inappropriate and potentially harmful intervention practices. For example, best practice interventions typically utilize a group education or instruction model, while traditional methods of couples counseling is considered inappropriate because it may expose a domestic violence victim to a heightened risk of abuse or retaliation. According to LCADV's 2012 report to the legislature, nearly half of the domestic abuse intervention program providers in Louisiana it surveyed reported using inappropriate interventions, such as anger management and individual counseling.

³¹ [Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Findings and Recommendations Relative to the Status of Domestic Abuse Intervention Programming in Louisiana,” February 2012](#)

Because there is no regulatory entity responsible for DAIP programs, there is no centralized list of DAIP providers statewide and nothing to hold providers accountable for providing effective programming. DCFS is responsible for oversight of domestic violence shelters and has developed standards for shelters and a quality assurance process that involves periodic inspections to ensure shelters are complying with standards. In comparison, state law does not designate an entity to oversee DAIPs. A report from LCADV found that courts, prosecutors, and correctional offices did not always maintain a list of programs and recommended that the state study the effectiveness of services that are designed to hold batterers accountable and are identified as DAIPs. State law³² requires DAIP program providers to have experience working directly with domestic abuse perpetrators and domestic abuse victims; experience facilitating batterer intervention groups; and training in the causes and dynamics of domestic violence, characteristics of batterers, victim safety, and sensitivity to victims. However, without a responsible entity, there is no one to ensure that DAIP programs meet these requirements or follow standards if they are mandated in the future, and there is no statewide list of approved or certified DAIPs for courts to refer to when ordering individuals to receive DAIP services. A certification or registration of programs that comply with standards would allow courts across the state to only make referrals to certified programs in their areas that demonstrate the ability to meet minimum state standards.

In 2012, LCADV made several recommendations to the legislature to improve DAIPs across the state, including:

- Developing a domestic abuse intervention program association, imbedded within LCADV, that would define best practices and monitor program quality
- Codifying state standards for DAIPs and require compliance with these standards
- Developing a uniform referral process for use by courts and other referral sources that includes a certification process based on state standards

Matter for Legislative Consideration 6: The legislature may wish to require that DAIP programs follow statewide standards.

Matter for Legislative Consideration 7: The legislature may wish to designate an entity responsible for oversight of DAIP programs, such as a commission, to improve consistency, collect data, and determine the effectiveness of the state's DAIP programs.

³² R.S. 14:35.3. Court-ordered DAIPs must be weekly in-person sessions occurring over 26 weeks that follows a model designed specifically for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Awareness efforts in public schools could be strengthened to better identify and prevent domestic violence incidents. Although state law requires that public schools provide education on dating violence for students and employees, not all Louisiana public schools meet these requirements. As a result, all students may not receive dating violence education or learn how to report instances of dating violence.

Dating violence is defined as a pattern of behavior where one person threatens to use, or actually uses, physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse to control his or her dating partner. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one in eight female and one in 26 male high school students report having experienced physical dating violence. Research³³ has shown that violence in adolescence may lead to more severe forms of violence in adult relationships, and evidence³⁴ shows that adolescents who undergo a school-based prevention program exhibit increased knowledge of and more appropriate attitudes about partner violence. See text box for public school dating violence requirements in state law.

State law requires public schools to provide **dating violence instruction annually** to seventh through twelfth grades, as well as all employees. Student education should include:

- the definition of dating violence
- warning signs
- characteristics of a healthy relationship

State law also requires schools to include dating violence information in student codes of conduct and to collect data relative to the number of dating violence incidents reported to school employees.

Source: R.S. 17:81(T)

In our survey of domestic violence shelter providers, 13 (81.3%) of 16 respondents stated that domestic violence training and education in public schools is not sufficient. One respondent stated that “getting into the schools is also an issue, prevention should start there.” A stakeholder in law enforcement also stated that more focus should be placed on prevention and education such as going into local schools and colleges to educate individuals on dating violence.

Not all Louisiana public schools meet the dating violence education and reporting requirements for seventh- through twelfth-grade students mandated in state law. The Louisiana legislature passed Act 321³⁵ in the 2010 Regular Legislative Session, which requires public schools to provide instruction on dating violence. In addition, Act 506 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session added additional mandates to public schools regarding dating violence, including providing instruction on dating violence annually to all employees who have contact with students in grades 7 through 12, requiring public schools to include specific information on dating violence in their student code of conduct, and requiring superintendents to collect data on dating violence incidents and report them to the governing authority. However, the legislature did not allocate additional funds for schools to meet these mandates. We contacted

³³ “The Need for School-Based Teen Dating Violence Prevention,” *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 2013

³⁴ Same source as above

³⁵ R.S. 17:81(T)

18 public school systems in both rural and urban areas of Louisiana³⁶ to determine whether they were providing students with the mandated instruction on dating violence and found that not all schools met these requirements. Exhibit 4 includes dating violence requirements outlined in state law and school system compliance.

Exhibit 4 Dating Violence Requirement Compliance in School Systems Surveyed As of July 2021							
Requirement Description		Met	Percent	Not Met	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Employee Instruction	Annual instruction to all school employees having contact with students in grades 7 through 12 on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dating violence definition Warning signs How to address suspected or reported dating violence involving students 	9	50.0%	9	50.0%	0	0.0%
Student Education	Provide seventh- through twelfth-grade students in Health Education instruction on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dating violence definition Warning signs Characteristics of healthy relationships 	7	38.9%	8	44.4%	3	16.7%
Information in Code of Conduct	Include in student codes of conduct: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dating violence definition Warning signs Instructions for reporting or seeking help 	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	0	0.0%
Data Collection*	Collect data on the number of incidents of dating violence reported to school employees and actions taken	5	29.4%	7	41.2%	1	5.9%
Superintendent Report**	Superintendent gives an oral report annually at the school governing authority meeting on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools compliance with the dating violence requirements Aggregate dating violence data Any recommendations for reducing dating violence among students 	1	6.7%	8	53.3%	6	40.0%
<p>*Four (23.5%) of the 17 schools that responded stated that they had no reported cases.</p> <p>**Only 15 schools responded to this question.</p> <p>Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information from R.S. 18:71(T) and survey responses from school systems.</p>							

No single entity is responsible for ensuring compliance with the law regarding dating violence, as school superintendents are only required to report to their local governing authority. According to the Louisiana Department of Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, neither entity has authority to enforce compliance with these laws. Not all of the schools we contacted were aware of the dating violence requirements in

³⁶ We selected a cross-section of school systems based on the number of protective orders in the parish, general size of the parish, and both urban and rural areas.

state law, but expressed a desire to comply with the requirements once they learned about them. For example, one school stated that it would add information on dating violence into its 2021-2022 Student Code of Conduct, and another school stated that now that it is aware of the requirements, it will begin this school year to collect data on dating violence.

Matter for Legislative Consideration 8: The legislature may wish to request an entity, such as the Department of Education or the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, to disseminate information to each school regarding the dating violence requirements in state law.