

AT A GLANCE

Location of Court

Rockford, Illinois

Type of Court

Domestic Violence
Coordinated Courts

Project Goals

- Increase victim safety, offender accountability, and informed judicial decision making
- Participate in training provided through the Office on Violence Against Women and technical assistance providers for all judicial and court personnel, prosecutors, law enforcement, advocates, and community stakeholders

WINNEBAGO COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COORDINATED COURTS

The Winnebago County Domestic Violence Coordinated Courts (DVCC) consist of both a full-time dedicated Domestic Violence Criminal Court and Domestic Violence Civil Court.



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COURT

INNOVATION

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This fact sheet is part of a series describing Domestic Violence Mentor Courts. Selected by the Office on Violence Against Women, Mentor Courts share their expertise and assist other domestic violence courts in implementing promising practices and procedures, and building the capacity of state court systems to respond effectively to these difficult cases.

COURT STAFF

Both criminal and civil court cases are heard by a **specially-trained judge**. A separate judge is assigned to the civil and criminal court and one presiding judge of the division serves as backup to the DVCC. Courts also staff a **bailiff** who is familiar with domestic violence dynamics and uses specialized protocol for handling the dockets. Court staff also include:

Criminal Cases

- **Case docket/resource coordinator:** assists with non-probation compliance, particularly in misdemeanor cases, as well as the order of protection docket
- **Specialized domestic violence probation unit:** manages all offenders placed on probation
- Dedicated team of domestic violence **prosecutors** and longstanding **public defenders**, in addition to assigned staff with training on domestic violence issues

Civil Cases

- **Case docket/resource coordinator:** assists with the order of protection dockets, civil compliance with partner abuse intervention programs, and communicates daily with domestic violence advocates to monitor the dockets
- **Non-governmental victim advocates:** assigned to each plenary docket to assist petitioners through order of protection process

CASE MANAGEMENT

Types of cases: The Domestic Violence Criminal Court adjudicates all levels of criminal misdemeanor and felony offenses involving intimate or former intimate partners, as well as associated orders of protection. The Domestic Violence Civil Court hears all intimate partner orders of protection and all domestic violence-related dissolution of marriage cases.

Case identification, screening, and transfer: Advocates and the circuit clerk's office screen orders of protection. The state's attorney's office and their dedicated domestic violence unit screens criminal cases. The clerk's office also screens dissolution of marriage and family cases using specialized IT reports based on eligibility criteria, and sometimes identified by the case docket/resource coordinator. Cases may need to be transferred by order of the presiding judge of the family and domestic violence division or the chief judge.

Information sharing: Cases between the same parties, such as orders of protection, divorce, family and criminal cases, may be "associated" so that the judge can call all case files to court, review orders for consistency, and address any conflict. Both domestic violence courts are also assigned a case docket/resource coordinator to assist with case docketing, information gathering, and compliance monitoring.

Schedule: Both courts are open full-time Monday through Friday. The Domestic Violence Criminal Court has two jury weeks per month, two misdemeanor compliance dockets on non-jury weeks and one felony compliance docket on non-jury weeks, and two plenary order of protection dockets each week. The Domestic Violence Civil Court has two plenary dockets each week, as well as an order of protection modification docket each Friday and two compliance dockets each month as well.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Frequency of stakeholder meetings: Monthly for the core team and quarterly for additional stakeholders and domestic violence professionals. Individual meetings are held as needed.

List of stakeholders: Winnebago County Sheriff's Office; probation; circuit clerk's office; state's attorney's office; law enforcement; 17th Judicial Circuit Family Violence Coordinating Council; a local domestic violence services agency (Remedies Renewing Lives); Rockford Sexual Assault Counseling; a local supervised visitation and exchange agency (Children's Safe Harbor); Visiting Nurses Association; Rockford Rescue Mission; YWCA/La Voz Latina, Prairie State Legal Services; Northern Illinois University, College of Law, Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic.

The core team includes the presiding judge of the family and domestic violence division and the DVCC judges, the project manager, case docket/resource coordinators, circuit clerk personnel, trial court administrator, supervising attorney of the Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic, and an additional judge from the juvenile court system.

VICTIM SAFETY

Court security: The DVCC engaged in a safety and security audit with the National Center for State Courts and developed a security task force to implement the following safety measures in the courthouse:

- A secure public entrance with metal detectors and x-ray screening
- Video surveillance
- Deputized security personnel throughout the courthouse (also available for escort)
- Experienced bailiffs assigned to the domestic violence courtrooms
- Duress buttons in the Domestic Violence Assistance Center
- A dedicated securities director
- Courtroom practices designed to separate victims and offenders during the order of protection dockets

Victim services: The Domestic Violence Assistance Center (DVAC) is located inside the courthouse and assists victims with drafting orders of protection, safety planning, resources/referrals, and court advocacy and accompaniment. The DVAC has two types of advocates: governmental and non-governmental, and victims have the autonomous choice of who they receive advocacy from. Victims are directed to the DVAC by security personnel, the self-help center, and the clerk's office.

Rockford Sexual Assault Counseling provides legal advocacy and court accompaniment for victims of sexual assault and sexual abuse, as well as many other services such as counseling, therapeutic groups, and a hotline. Victims are also connected to local law enforcement domestic violence units (located in or close to the courthouse) by advocates if the victim should need to file or follow up on a police report.

Supervised visitation and safe exchange: Children's Safe Harbor is a safe visitation exchange and supervised visitation facility that offers free services by court order or self/agency referral for families experiencing domestic violence.

Risk assessment: Court Services uses the **Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI)** at two different levels:

- The pre-trial services department uses the DVSI to prepare bond recommendations in intimate partner violence cases; and
- The adult probation domestic violence unit then uses the DVSI post-adjudication in cases when the DVSI was not used by pre-trial services (such as when the defendant posted bond on a warrant prior to the assessment) to determine risk level and probation officer assignment.

OFFENDER ACCOUNTABILITY

Compliance: The Domestic Violence Criminal Court holds a misdemeanor compliance docket twice every other week and a felony compliance docket once every other week. Compliance is monitored by a specialized adult probation domestic violence unit and a part-time case docket/resource coordinator. At each compliance docket, the judge monitors each defendant for compliance with orders to partner abuse intervention programming, the domestic violence impact panel, and any other orders to comply with court supervision, conditional discharge, or probation.

The Domestic Violence Civil Court holds a special docket twice per month to monitor respondents for compliance with orders to attend partner abuse intervention programming/domestic violence impact panel and other orders within the order of protection.

Offender Services: Offenders are often ordered to attend the domestic violence impact panel, which is a one-time intervention session facilitated by the adult probation domestic violence unit and held on a quarterly basis. The domestic violence impact panel is scheduled separately for men and women. Winnebago County has six private providers of partner abuse intervention programs, two with Spanish language capabilities, and one county-funded program for indigent offenders placed on probation. Offenders are ordered to complete partner abuse intervention programs either through criminal court orders, civil court orders, as a condition of bond, or possibly through juvenile court orders.

LEGAL SERVICES

Prairie State Legal Services offers pro bono legal services to qualifying individuals in many cases, including orders of protection, divorce, and family cases. The Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic of Northern Illinois University, College of Law provides attorney and student representation for qualifying individuals in order of protection cases.

TRAINING

The DVCC staff has participated in training that includes:

- *Enhancing Judicial Skills in Domestic Violence Cases Workshop*
- *Domestic Violence Court Open Houses*

The DVCC has provided local community training for attorneys, advocates, and social service agencies on:

- *Offender Accountability and Group Reporting*
- *Coordinated Court Response to Domestic Violence*
- *Intimate Partner Sexual Abuse*
- *Duluth Abuse Intervention Programs on Parenting in the Context of Domestic Violence*

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