

AT A GLANCE

Location of Court

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Type of Court

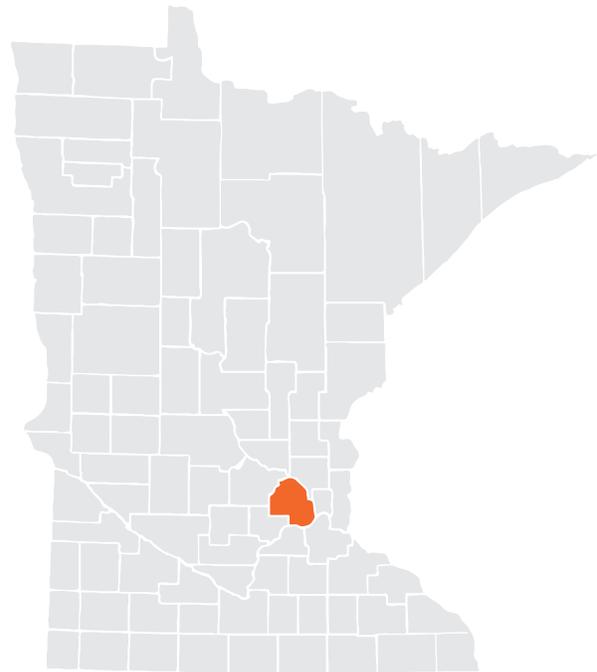
Domestic Violence Family Court

Project Goals

- Ensure offender accountability and engagement
- Ensure victim safety
- Enhance information sharing around risk
- Ensure consistent handling of cases involving domestic violence
- Improve child custody decision-making in cases involving domestic violence
- Improve access to justice for the Native American community

FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT FAMILY COURT, JUDICIARY COURT OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Fourth Judicial District Family Court handles civil protection orders, marriage dissolutions, custody and parenting time cases, and paternity and child support establishment proceedings.



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COURT STAFF

- **Court operations supervisor:** responsible for supervising legal clerical document processing activities and operations of the Family Court division
- **Judges and referees:** preside over family court cases such as divorce, child custody and support, domestic abuse, and paternity
- **Project coordinator:** grant management and reporting, management of project logistics, budget and policy; maintaining federal and district compliance; coordinating data collection for the domestic violence calendars and serving as the primary point of contact between the court, community stakeholders and partners, along with national partners
- **Staff attorney of Hennepin County Family Court:** staff attorney performs professional legal work, legal research, and legal consultation for court judicial officers and staff
- **Director of the Hennepin County Domestic Abuse Service Center (DASC):** director supervises services provided at the DASC, which is a collaborative effort of the District, Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Hennepin County Sheriff's Department, Minneapolis City Attorney's Office, Hennepin County Department of Corrections, and multiple community-based and culturally-specific domestic violence advocacy agencies
- **Supervisor of advocacy:** oversees the advocacy program of the Domestic Abuse Project which helps victims with safety planning and helping them navigate the criminal and civil legal systems

CASE MANAGEMENT

Types of cases: Domestic violence protective orders, marriage dissolutions, paternity, custody and parenting time, and child support

Case identification, screening, and transfer: Hennepin County District Court Administration and staff of the Hennepin County Domestic Abuse Service Center review all filings within Family Court and then determine where each case should be heard. For any new domestic abuse or family court case involving the same parties filed, court administration staff review the Minnesota Case Information System for assignment to the same judicial officer who heard the domestic abuse case—a "one family one judge" approach. Dually assigned domestic abuse and family court cases can then be handled in tandem as needed.

Information sharing: The Minnesota Case Information System allows the court to access information about parties, such as open and related cases.

Schedule: Domestic abuse calendars are heard on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Child-related relief domestic abuse calendars are heard on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8:45, 9:15, 9:45, and 10:15 am. Cases in which there is no child-related relief are heard on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays at 8:45, 9:15, 9:45, and 10:15 am.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Frequency of stakeholder meetings: Monthly

List of stakeholders: Victim services, legal aid, legal advocacy agencies, mental health providers, alternative dispute resolution providers, and organizations working with the Native American community.

VICTIM SAFETY

Court security: The Hennepin County Family Court is located in the Family Justice Center which has a secured building entrance with weapons screening. Parties are directed to separate monitored waiting rooms prior to hearings and Hennepin County Sheriff's Office deputies staff a central security desk. Deputies escort parties to and from courtrooms and from the building, if necessary.

Victim services:

- **Domestic Abuse Service Center (DASC):** Hennepin County's Domestic Abuse Service Center is a collaborative effort of the Fourth Judicial District, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Department, the Minneapolis City Attorney's Office, the Hennepin County Department of Corrections and multiple community-based and culturally-specific domestic violence advocacy agencies. This Center is a "one-stop shop" where victims of domestic violence can access coordinated legal and advocacy services when seeking protection from domestic abuse.
- **Self Help Center:** Hennepin County's Self Help Center is a place where parties can find helpful information and services about their legal problems if they are not represented by an attorney. Legal information includes court forms and tools to help them complete court forms, answers general questions about court process and procedure, and help preparing for their day in court.
- **Hennepin County Family Court Services (FCS):** Hennepin County's Family Court Services Division works with the Fourth Judicial District Family Court to assist families in resolving custody and parenting time disputes. They work toward reducing family conflict and promoting healthy communities by creating child-centered solutions for families. One special service it provides is a Social Early Neutral Evaluation which is an alternate dispute resolution process designed to assist families in exploring settlement options to their custody and parenting time disputes.

Supervised visitation: Hennepin County Family Court utilizes several local supervised visitation centers. One is Perspectives, Inc., which offers monitored visitation, supervised visitation, and monitored exchanges.

Risk assessment: Family Court Judicial Officers utilize the SAFeR Approach to custody and parenting time cases developed by the Battered Women's Justice Project with respect to identifying and addressing domestic abuse. The SAFeR Approach consists of four steps: **S**creening for domestic violence; **A**ssessing the nature and context of the domestic violence; **F**ocusing on the effects of the domestic violence; and **R**esponding to the effects of domestic

violence. Each step of the SAFeR Approach is accompanied by specific color-coded guides, charts and worksheets to analyze domestic violence in any given case. Family Court has also encouraged stakeholders to utilize the applicable domestic violence guides and worksheets. Standardized utilization of the SAFeR Approach increases the likelihood that domestic violence will be detected and ideally lead to more consistent systems responses.

OFFENDER ACCOUNTABILITY

Compliance reviews: Critical to the improved handling of domestic abuse cases is the scheduling of review hearings when restricted parenting time or programming, chemical health, and/or therapeutic services have been ordered. These hearings are scheduled for two to four months after the order for protection is issued. Review hearings assist in holding perpetrators of domestic violence accountable by monitoring court-ordered participation in programming and/or evaluation(s); determining readiness of respondents and children for unsupervised/ expanded parenting time; and reviewing any exceptions to no-contact provisions intended to facilitate safe communication between parents regarding children and parenting.

Offender services: Offenders are frequently ordered to participate in batterers intervention programming with local providers. Many of these providers offer men's domestic abuse programming that is culturally-specific.

LEGAL SERVICES

Central Minnesota Legal Services and Tubman provide victims with day-of, on-site consultations and/or representation in domestic violence cases and/or related family court cases at no cost.

TRAINING

Judicial officers, court staff, and stakeholders have participated in training events on the following topics:

- *Hennepin County Family Court - Domestic Violence Training*—“in house” training for judicial officers, law clerks and District Court Administration staff
- *The SAFeR Approach to OFP Child-Related Relief Advocacy*
- *Family Court: Domestic Violence Revisited*—a multidisciplinary domestic violence training
- *Emergency Filing or Order for Protection? Which meets our need?*
- *Family Court Enhancement Project: Improving Outcomes in Custody Cases Involving Domestic Violence*
- *Domestic Violence: Bridging the Gaps across the Divisions*

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