

AT A GLANCE

Location of Court

Pulaski, Virginia

Type of Court

Civil and Criminal

Project Goals

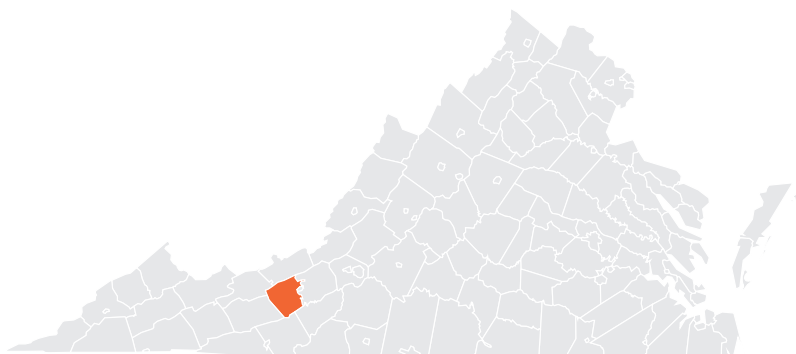
Increase safety for victim-survivors and accountability for people who cause harm by maintaining compliance and employing best practices in the field of intimate partner violence

Provide regular free trainings for stakeholder professionals on best practices for handling cases involving intimate partner violence

Share resources with other courts looking to establish a similar domestic violence docket

PULASKI COUNTY JUVENILE AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS DISTRICT COURT

The Pulaski County Juvenile and Domestic Relations (JDR) District Court handles all criminal cases involving intimate partner violence, family violence, sexual assault where either party is a minor, and civil protection orders. Located in a small rural county in Virginia, this court also handles all cases involving custody, support/visitation, child abuse or neglect, juvenile delinquency, and status offenses (those acts that are unlawful only because they are committed by a minor).



COURT STAFF

- **Judge:** one judge adjudicates all hearings in the court.
- **Clerk of Court:** handles all documents and files produced by the cases on the domestic violence docket and protective order dockets. Supervises clerks who handle the additional documents and files from remainder of cases heard in the juvenile and domestic relations district court.
- **Mentor Court Coordinator:** serves as a point of contact for project partners and liaison between court and stakeholders.

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.

CASE MANAGEMENT

Types of cases: The Pulaski Juvenile and Domestic Relations (JDR) District Court meets five days per week and hears custody, visitation, child and spousal support, delinquency, dependency, protective orders, crimes against children, all crimes between family or household members, child in need of services, and child in need of supervision petitions. Three intimate partner violence dockets operate in Pulaski, including a daily protective order docket, and an intimate partner violence compliance and criminal docket operating once a week.

Case identification, screening, and transfer: Pulaski County has one Juvenile and Domestic Relations court with one designated judge. The court therefore does not “transfer” cases as is done in larger jurisdictions with multiple judges and different assignments. The clerk identifies the case type and assigns it to the appropriate docket.

Information sharing: Pulaski holds a quarterly Coordinated Community Response Team meeting for stakeholders to share information and discuss current issues in the community, including issues that have arisen from the dockets, and other concerns related to domestic and sexual violence different agencies are experiencing in Pulaski. They also brainstorm, problem-solve, and identify gaps in service that need to be addressed, including training ideas. Judicial leadership in developing community relationships has been key to their success, garnering community buy-in and demonstrating a commitment to ongoing problem-solving. Without the resources of larger communities, these relationships and judicial commitment have been integral in implementing a variety of low- or no-cost solutions to problems that have arisen from the dockets.

Other examples of information-sharing include the prosecutor referencing the results of the Lethality Assessment Program at bond hearings; advocates manually screening cases to flag domestic violence cases; including notes in the case file regarding victim-survivor input; and information shared by advocates with the Commonwealth’s Attorney on the day of court. Abusive partner accountability programs also share participation information with probation officers, who then share that information in the court’s compliance docket hearings.

Schedule: The Pulaski Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court meets five days per week (8:30 am to 4:30 pm), with the compliance and calendaring docket every Wednesday and the protective order docket each day.

Caseload: 2,555

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Description of stakeholder meetings: The stakeholder meetings serve several purposes. The Pulaski Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Judge leads the meetings and sets the agenda based on the needs of the courts and the needs of stakeholder agencies. Specific cases are never discussed. One purpose is to examine and develop best policies, practices, and procedures of the dockets to make the court experience more responsive, efficient, impartial, and consistent. Another purpose is to identify local trends, challenges, and concerns related to domestic violence dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking in the community and address solutions to problems that arise. Finally, the stakeholder meetings serve to create networking opportunities that facilitate communication and relationships among those serving the community by promoting accountability and ensuring victim-survivor safety.

Frequency of stakeholder meetings: Quarterly

List of stakeholders:

- Pulaski Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court (judge, court clerk)
- Women's Resource Center (court advocate, victim-survivor services)
- Commonwealth Attorney's Office (victim-victim-survivor-witness coordinator, prosecutor)
- Defense Bar (public defender's office)
- Department of Social Services (services for families)
- Legal Aid (legal services for victim-survivors with civil hearings)
- Blue Ridge Counseling (abusive partner intervention services)
- Law enforcement agencies (Virginia State Police, Pulaski Co Sheriff's Office, Town of Pulaski Police Department, Town of Dublin Police Department)
- Court Services Unit (protective order intake)
- Magistrate's office
- New River Community Corrections (probation)
- SAFE Center of SWVA (forensic nurse exams)
- Private attorneys
- Private interpreter

VICTIM SAFETY

Court security: Bailiffs and advocates ensure safety while victim-survivors are in the courthouse. An additional measure of safety for victim-survivors on the protective order docket involves delayed exit for the respondent. The judge requires respondents to watch Pulaski's 13-

minute video, “*Protective Orders in Virginia*,” in a side conference room, escorted by the Bailiff. This allows victim-survivors time to leave the courthouse safely.

Victim services: The Women’s Resource Center employs full-time advocates who work directly with victim-survivors around legal advocacy and safety planning prior to, during, and after court hearings. These advocates are present in the courtroom for the protective order, compliance, and criminal domestic violence dockets.

Advocates work out of a community-based victim-survivor services organization and connect victim-survivors with appropriate community resources post-final adjudication. The prosecutor’s office also employs a victim-victim-survivor witness representative who handles cases on the domestic violence criminal docket that involve restitution. A representative from each organization is present in the courtroom for the domestic violence dockets and all work collaboratively to ensure victim-survivors have an advocate, are aware of the court proceedings, and are safe on the day of court by utilizing alternative entrances and exits, waiting spaces, and escorting victim-survivors to their cars when appropriate.

For victim-survivor safety prior to hearings, the Lethality Assessment Program is used at the point of initial law enforcement interaction.]

Supervised visitation and safe exchange: The local sheriff’s office offers a safe exchange site.

Domestic violence risk assessment: [Local law enforcement officers use the Lethality Assessment Program when they respond to a domestic violence call. The Commonwealth’s Attorney presents the LAP results at bond hearings.

ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PEOPLE WHO CAUSE HARM

Compliance reviews: For compliance reviews, the court takes first offense charges under advisement for two years, places the person who caused harm¹ on supervised probation, orders them to complete an accredited abusive partner intervention program, and monitors compliance with periodic hearings until completion. Compliance reviews are used to ensure defendants who are on a deferred disposition track for a domestic/sexual violence charge are following through with the requirements of the deferral to have the charges dismissed at the end of the two-year

¹ The authors use people-first language. “Victim-survivor” refers to the person being harmed, and “people who cause harm” to the person causing harm through IPV/coercive control.

sentence. The compliance review offers the judge an opportunity to meet with the defendant, their probation officer, and others as necessary to review the defendant's status. Non-compliance can result in additional hearings, sanctions, and ultimately a conviction on the original deferred disposition.

Services for people who cause harm: The local abusive partner intervention services are available to anyone. For those unable to pay the full amount for mandatory classes, the probation office offers limited funds to subsidize services. The court requires respondents subject to a protective order to watch a video entitled "Protective Orders in Virginia" This helps respondents better understand protective order requirements.

Programming for people who cause harm: In our rural locality, abusive partner intervention services are currently provided by a local counseling agency with national expertise in domestic and sexual violence, particularly high-risk sex offenders. The program, Domestic Violence Alternatives Program, (DVAP) is an 18 week program designed to comply with the Virginia Batterer Intervention Program Certification regulations. [Virginia Batterer Intervention Program Certification Board \(vabipboard.org\)](http://vabipboard.org)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRAINING

Due to limited resources in the rural community, many agencies are unable to afford to send staff to national trainings on intimate partner violence. As such, the Pulaski County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court made it a priority to offer free trainings to multidisciplinary audiences of professionals in surrounding localities. To fund these events, they partnered with local agencies, applied for grants, utilized free and low-cost technical assistance providers, and asked for in-kind donations from the local community college to offer comprehensive trainings at no cost to individuals. Training topics include foundational principles around intimate partner violence, animal cruelty and its intersection with intimate partner violence, responding to children who witness intimate partner violence, improving practices around civil protective orders, stalking, strangulation, risk assessment, non-stranger sexual assault, and improving court and community responses.

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