

## AT A GLANCE

### Location of Court

St. Louis County, Missouri  
(St. Louis County refers to the region just outside of St. Louis City with over three times the population of the city, totaling nearly one million residents.)

### Type of Court

Civil Court operating under Domestic Relations Services

### Project Goals

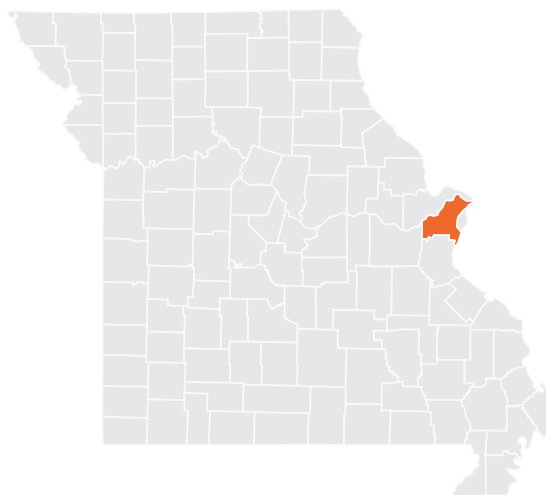
Increase safety for victim-survivors and their children who are going through the Order of Protection process

Increase accountability for people who cause harm<sup>1</sup>; reduce gun violence within the St. Louis region through the Firearm Relinquishment program

Maintain a coordinated community response to domestic violence from the justice system to partner agencies

## ST. LOUIS COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT

St. Louis County Domestic Violence (DV) Court handles civil Orders of Protection (OP) between current or former intimate partners. This includes five weekly Orders of Protection issuing dockets, three monthly Orders of Protection Contempt dockets, and two monthly Judicial Monitoring dockets.



## COURT STAFF

- **DV Court Manager:** Provides all administrative oversight of the Domestic Violence Court operations, including: staff supervision; grant writing and reporting; development and refinement of program policies and procedures. Coordinates and facilitates regular meetings between Domestic Violence Court judiciary, staff, and other court stakeholders.
- **DV Court Coordinator:** Coordinates and provides case management for the operations of the Domestic Violence Court's issuing Orders of Protection dockets and OP contempt

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.

dockets. Attends all Domestic Violence Court issuing and contempt dockets and supports judges/division staff, program staff, volunteers, and litigants involved in the docket.

- **DV Court Assistance Coordinator:** Coordinates services such as safety planning, resource referrals, and crisis intervention/support for s as they proceed through the Orders of Protection process. Provides training and oversight to advocate volunteers and case management/follow-up services.
- **DV Court Compliance Coordinator:** Oversees the compliance program for Domestic Violence Court respondents ordered to participate in special conditions such as Batterer's Intervention Programming, Substance Abuse Counseling and/or Firearms Relinquishment. Connects respondents to community programming and reports their special condition compliance back to the court. Manages the Judicial Monitoring dockets in accordance with best practices and assists with all three contempt dockets, acting as a liaison between the judge, attorneys, program providers, and respondents.
- **DV Court Compliance Case Manager:** Assists the Compliance Coordinator with providing case management services to respondents, especially those ordered to participate in special conditions (noted above).
- **DV Court Volunteer Coordinator:** Recruits, screens, onboards, trains, schedules, manages, and coordinates placement for volunteer advocates, including professional advocates provided by community stakeholders (ALIVE and the Crime Center) and attorneys who volunteer on Domestic Violence Court dockets.
- **DV Court Judges:** (1) Five judges preside over weekly Domestic Violence Court Orders of Protection dockets; (2) two judges preside over bi-monthly Contempt dockets; (3) two judges preside over bi-monthly Judicial Monitoring dockets for special conditions, such as Batterer's Intervention Programming, Substance Abuse evaluation/treatment, and/or Firearm Relinquishment.
- **Other Court Personnel:** (1) Orders of Protection Office/Domestic Violence Court Division Clerks; (2) Courtroom Bailiffs/Security Officers.

## CASE MANAGEMENT

**Types of cases:** (1) Civil Orders of Protection involving former or current intimate partners; (2) Civil Judicial Monitoring/Compliance cases; (3) Orders of Protection Civil Contempt (for respondents' non-compliance with special conditions (e.g. Firearm Relinquishment) ordered in an Order of Protection); (4) Order of Protection Indirect Criminal Contempt.

**Case identification, screening, and transfer:** The clerk at arraignment sets all misdemeanor domestic violence cases for first appearance in Domestic Violence Court. Felony charges amended to a misdemeanor domestic violence are assigned to Domestic Violence Court at plea for sentencing and judicial monitoring.

**Information-sharing:** The Missouri Case Net system allows Court personnel to access statewide court information on open/pending domestic, juvenile, and/or criminal court cases that may be relevant/related to the current case litigants. There is also a significant level of coordination and collaboration between Domestic Violence Court staff and program staff within other sectors of our court system. Additionally, when an Orders of Protection is entered by a judge, it is also entered into REJIS (Regional Justice Information System) and MULES (Missouri Uniform Law Enforcement System), which allows law enforcement to access Orders of Protection and their specific rulings.

**Schedule:** Weekly Domestic Violence Court Orders of Protection dockets are held on Monday mornings (9:00 am) and afternoons (1:30 pm); Wednesday mornings (9:00 am); and Thursday mornings (9:00 am) and afternoons (1:30 pm). Domestic Violence Court Contempt dockets are held on Friday afternoons (1:00 pm) twice a month, and the Domestic Violence Court Judicial Monitoring dockets are also held twice a month on the first Friday morning of the month (9:00 am) and the second Wednesday afternoon of the month (1:30 pm).

## COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

**Stakeholder meetings:** The St. Louis Ending Domestic and Sexual Violence Network meeting is held monthly. The purpose of the meeting is to offer a networking opportunity to individuals working in domestic and sexual violence spaces. Meetings are used to discuss issues related to domestic and sexual violence, new resources, and available programs. Another stakeholder meeting is the Family Violence Counsel meeting, which meets bi-monthly. A cross section of leaders working in St. Louis County, such as police, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, and advocates, meet to discuss issues, trends, new laws, and resources related to Family Violence in St. Louis County.

**List of stakeholders:** Our stakeholders include the following: service providers (counseling/support, crisis intervention, shelter, etc.); legal aid/advocacy providers; batterer intervention providers; mental health/other social service providers; law enforcement; Family Law and defense attorneys; Guardians Ad Litem; and the Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

## **VICTIM-SURVIVOR SAFETY**

**Court security:** There is a security checkpoint upon entry into the St. Louis County courthouse. Metal detectors and X-ray machines are used to screen for weapons. The Domestic Violence courtroom is located on the street level, just steps away from the security office. Within the Domestic Violence courtroom, litigants are always seated on the opposite side of the courtroom from where respondents are seated. To prevent any direct contact during the docket and to ensure petitioners' and respondents' movements are staggered, bailiffs closely monitor the timing of when the respondents and/or the petitioners step out of the courtroom for any reason. Upon final departure from the courtroom, petitioners are released first. Respondents are held in the courtroom for 15 minutes following the departure of the corresponding petitioner. All Domestic Violence Court dockets are staffed by two courtroom bailiffs and a security officer who monitors the hallway outside of the courtroom. Additionally, the security officer is also responsible for arranging officer escorts for petitioners/s who would like to be escorted to their vehicle or public transportation as an added safety precaution.

**Victim-survivor services:** advocates are available to s throughout the Orders of Protection process. Advocates offer emotional support/crisis intervention, information about the Orders of Protection process, safety planning, and community resource referrals. An advocate through the **Crime Center (CVC)** is available to assist s that come into the Orders of Protection Office to file a petition. The **Domestic Violence Court Assistance Coordinator (VAC)** along with volunteer advocates and/or professional advocates from **Crime Center and ALIVE** are available during all Domestic Violence Court dockets and between court appearances. Additionally, Domestic Violence Court advocates conduct telephone follow-up with s upon the conclusion of their court case(s). To support victim-survivors going through criminal and civil Orders of Protection proceedings concurrently, the Domestic Violence Court Assistance Coordinator coordinates with advocates in the prosecutor's office when necessary.

**Supervised visitation and safe exchange:** Upon issuing a Full Order of Protection, the judge may issue a supervised visitation order for respondents. A domestic violence screening is conducted on all incoming referrals. Some cases require supervised visitation and safe custody exchanges which are provided through the Family Court's Domestic Relations Services (DRS) department and the Exchange Center program.

**DV risk assessment:** All Domestic Violence Court Order of Protection petitions are screened by Domestic Violence Court staff or a trained advocate to identify s/cases that are deemed high-risk based on domestic violence risk and lethality research/indicators (history of strangulation, rape, and threatening use of a firearm within the relationship). Cases identified as high-risk receive more follow-up and if necessary are prioritized during dockets. A bench card on the risks associated with judges' decision-making on Ex Parte Orders as well as Full Orders of Protections is utilized by Domestic Violence court judges.

## **ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PEOPLE WHO CAUSE HARM**

**Compliance:** People who cause harm ordered to special condition programming (i.e. abusive partner intervention program (APIP), substance abuse evaluation/treatment, and/or firearm relinquishment) will routinely be scheduled for compliance review hearings with a Judicial Monitoring judge and Domestic Violence Court compliance program staff. The frequency of compliance hearings is determined by level of compliance and length of time in the program. Non-compliance with special condition programming will result in the case being transferred to the Domestic Violence Court Civil Contempt docket, wherein the judge has the ability to hold the respondent in contempt of court and issue a warrant for their arrest.

**Services/programming for people who cause harm:** Based on factors associated with a case, people who cause harm are typically ordered to participate in special condition programming, which can include one or more of the following:

**Abusive Partner Intervention Programs (APIP):** Abusive partner intervention programming is offered through community-based providers. During the mandatory orientation with Domestic Violence Court compliance staff, people who cause harm are provided with five abusive partner intervention programs to choose from. Each program is for a minimum of 26 weeks and vary in cost, which the respondent is responsible for. Compliance staff are in regular communication with people who cause harm and their abusive partner intervention program staff so that information regarding compliance (or lack thereof) can be presented to the Judicial Monitoring judge.

- **Substance Abuse Evaluation/Treatment:** In cases where the petitioner alleges substance abuse as a contributing factor of the alleged abuse, the respondent may be required to have a substance abuse evaluation. If ordered by the court, respondent must complete a substance abuse evaluation and subsequent recommended treatment. During the course of treatment, compliance staff regularly communicate with people who cause harm and their

substance abuse treatment program. Information regarding compliance or the lack thereof is presented to the Judicial Monitoring judge.

- **Firearm Relinquishment:** People who cause harm can be ordered to: (1) not possess any firearms for the duration of the Full Order of Protection; and/or (2) relinquish any firearms currently in their possession for the duration of the Full Order of Protection. Whenever there is credible evidence that the respondent is in possession of a firearm, the judge will require him/her to relinquish it in one of the following manners: to a verified third party (who must complete a notarized or sworn Third Party Affidavit in the presence of the court), to St. Louis County Law Enforcement, or through a verifiable bill of sale to a licensed dealer. Any people who cause harm required to relinquish firearms must appear in front of a Judicial Monitoring judge and complete a sworn statement verifying either their firearm(s) relinquishment (with proof) or their non-possession of firearms. If a respondent is found to possess firearms during the time that the Full Order of Protection is in effect, she/he can be found in Indirect Criminal Contempt or be criminally charged.

**Specially Appointed Contempt Attorneys (SACA's):** Responsible for prosecuting respondents with Full OP alleged violations. These cases are handled on the Domestic Violence Court Indirect Criminal Contempt (ICC) and Civil Contempt dockets. The Family Court also employs a Defense Attorney available to represent indigent respondents at all Domestic Violence Court Contempt dockets.

## LEGAL SERVICES TRAINING

**Legal Services of Eastern Missouri (LSEM):** has an advocate present in the Orders of Protection Office once a week offering on-site, immediate access to their intake process. Their advocates also regularly refer s to community-based legal aid services.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRAINING

The St. Louis County Domestic Violence Court has provided training to court staff, law enforcement, bailiffs, security personnel, and attorneys on topics such as courthouse safety and security, domestic violence orders of protection, and domestic violence advocacy

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