

An Informed Response

An Overview of the Domestic Violence Court
Technology Application and Resource Link



Written by

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2001

This publication was supported under grant number 98-N-037-U-001 from the State Justice Institute. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the the State Justice Institute. The Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link was developed and implemented with support from a United States Department of Justice Violence Against Women Grant to Encourage Arrest Policies, a STOP Formula grant from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services and the State Justice Institute.

About the Author

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Technical Specifications for the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link

The Domestic Violence Court Technology Application was written in Microsoft Active Server Pages (ASP), Java and Visual Basic languages. Hardware consists of Local Area Network (10 nodes), Wide Area Network and Digital Signature Pads. Windows NT 4.0, server; Novell Netware 4.11, server; Windows 98/NT workstation, client; and TCP/IP make up the network environment. Software needs include Sybase, Internet Explorer 5, Microsoft Internet Information Server (IIS), Adobe Acrobat and Active Reports.

An Overview of the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link

Introduction

In the spring of 2000, the New York State Unified Court System unveiled a new tool for handling domestic violence cases: the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link. Developed by the Center for Court Innovation, the New York State Unified Court System's independent research and development arm, the application is a computer software program that uses Internet technology to connect specialized domestic violence courts with criminal justice agencies and social service providers. It allows users — which include judges, attorneys, victim advocates and batterers' intervention programs — to share information instantaneously. The application immediately notifies courtroom staff when an order of protection has been formally violated. Attorneys and victim advocates can stay on top of the latest case developments. And off-site service providers are able to provide court players with up-to-date information about their clients. The goal is to promote greater coordination and to help improve the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence crime. By creating a centralized and secure communication system, the application helps hold defendants accountable and protect victims.

This white paper is intended to assist court planners in the design and implementation of domestic violence court technology. It spells out the basic principles that have animated domestic violence technology in New York and walks through the principle features of New York's computer application. The goal is to help others learn from New York's experience, offering a foundation from which other technology experiments can be launched.

New York State Domestic Violence Courts

In June 1996, the New York State Unified Court System, working in partnership with the local defense bar, the Kings County District Attorney's Office, Safe Horizon and the Center for Court Innovation, opened the Brooklyn Felony Domestic Violence Court, the state's first specialized court part dedicated to handling domestic violence cases. The mission of the Brooklyn Court is to create an effective and coordinated response to domestic violence crime through intensive defendant monitoring, increased victim access to services and safety planning, and extensive collaboration with a network of criminal justice and community-based agencies. A single presiding judge and permanent prosecution team handle all eligible cases from the post-indictment arraignment through disposition. To aid the judge in monitoring defendant compliance and promoting victim assistance, a resource coordinator obtains

information from criminal justice partners and off-site agencies, and notifies them of all Court dispositions, changes in Court-ordered conditions and the status of orders of protection.

The Brooklyn experiment was soon followed by the Bronx Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Court, which began operations in June 1998. The Bronx Court adapts the Brooklyn model to a high-volume misdemeanor setting. The Bronx Court is organized into three parts: the AP (all-purpose) Part, which handles all domestic violence cases post-arraignment until they are disposed of by plea or are trial-ready; the Trial Part, which handles all trials; and the Compliance Part, which monitors all defendants sentenced by either the AP or Trial Judge, when mandated conditions include participation in a batterers' intervention or other community-based programs. The Bronx Court, like its Brooklyn counterpart, features enhanced staffing and permanent teams from key Court partners. Similarly, the goals of the misdemeanor court model are: to provide an immediate, consistent, and certain response to domestic violence crimes; to effectively monitor defendant compliance with orders of protection and mandated program participation; and to promote victim safety.

Over the past several years, the New York State Unified Court System has replicated and adapted these two court models in a variety of settings throughout the state, including: a second Brooklyn Felony Part; the Buffalo Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Court; the Westchester County Domestic Violence Court, which handles misdemeanor and felony cases; the Bronx Felony Domestic Violence Court; and the Suffolk County Domestic Violence Court, which handles misdemeanors and criminal contempt felonies. Planning for additional courts is under way in several other jurisdictions, including Queens County in New York City and Rensselaer County in upstate New York. And in 2001, New York State Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye announced a plan to create Integrated Domestic Violence Courts in four pilot sites. These courts will handle criminal domestic violence cases and related family issues, including custody, visitation and civil protection orders.

The new approaches to domestic violence being tested in New York have already yielded some encouraging results. For example, during the first four years of operation at the Brooklyn Domestic Violence Court, the probation violation rate for defendants has steadily decreased and is now half of the typical rate for these cases. In addition, the Brooklyn Court's average dismissal rate during this period was 6.1 percent — a sharp decline from the rate before the Court opened. The Court also offers services and safety planning to virtually 100 percent of victims with pending cases through victim advocates who are teamed with district attorneys on each case. While there is a need for more independent evaluation of these experiments, the early findings suggest that a more coordinated response can help improve the way that domestic violence cases are handled. The challenge, of course, is how to promote greater coordination in a fractured criminal justice system.

Role of Technology

Technology offers one answer. When the Brooklyn Domestic Violence Court opened, planners from the Center for Court Innovation in partnership with the court system

began researching how technology might enhance court operations. Previously, they had designed computer applications for two other innovative New York City courts — the Midtown Community Court and the Brooklyn Treatment Court. Both of these courts have demonstrated that technology significantly increases a judge’s ability to make informed decisions, enhances the accountability of offenders and promotes collaboration with court partners.

In the context of domestic violence, the importance of collaboration among multiple partners would be magnified. Insiders complained that the high quantity of paperwork, faxes and phone calls between court personnel and off-site partners (police, probation, victim service agencies, batterers’ intervention programs) in domestic violence cases was more than just time-consuming and frustrating — it could have serious impacts on the lives of victims and defendants. If a defendant failed to attend a court-ordered program, it could take days for that fact to appear as a written report in his file. There were also often delays in the filing of orders of protection on the New York State Domestic Violence Registry, the statewide electronic archive of all orders of protection. Furthermore, partner agencies often did not learn right away about the terms of court orders and outcomes of court appearances.

Without accurate and immediate information, it was difficult for the system to address victim concerns and ensure that cases were handled swiftly. Planners believed that technology could both improve the efficiency of case processing and increase the speed and comprehensiveness of communication. “We wanted to see how a technology application could help fulfill the domestic violence court model’s principles of victim safety, defendant accountability and swift judicial response,” Chief Judge Kaye said.

Planning

To develop a domestic violence court application, technology planners conducted a comprehensive needs assessment, soliciting input from an advisory board that consisted of both court personnel and representatives of partner agencies. Ideas came from all quarters. Judges, for instance, requested that each defendant’s compliance information appear in reverse chronological order so that they could quickly review the most recent information first. Clerks requested standardized court forms. Given the safety and confidentiality concerns of domestic violence victims, planners worked closely with victim advocates to develop a secure system.

The development of the core application was supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Violence Against Women Grant to Encourage Arrest Policies program, and a STOP Formula grant from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. Funding from the State Justice Institute enabled planners to build Resource Link into the application, allowing courts and their off-site partners to exchange information in real time.

Rapid Flow of Information

With the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link in place, judges in domestic violence courts can now access up-to-the-minute information about defendants — including a defendant’s compliance record at a batterers’

intervention program — and, with victim consent, updates on victim status and reports of alleged violations of orders of protection. This means that judges can make more informed decisions based on a comprehensive report of each case. For example, if a noncompliance report has been filed, a red signal quickly alerts courtroom players. The judge can then review the case in more detail and decide whether immediate action — such as expediting the defendant’s court appearance or a hearing on whether to revoke bail — is required.

Off-site partners file updates and compliance reports directly into the application from their offices. The information is immediately available to all users, eliminating the need for faxes or phone calls. Any changes in court-ordered conditions or orders of protection are instantly accessible.

Orders of protection are created electronically through the application. Once executed by the judge through an electronic signature pad, the order of protection is automatically uploaded to the state’s Domestic Violence Registry. Copies of executed orders can be printed by partners right from their offices. The bottom line is that the domestic violence application prevents delays, reduces the chance of error in data entry and saves time for all of the partners.

Security

To ensure security, victim safety and confidentiality, the application is run on a closed system. A proprietary Intranet tool that runs on Microsoft’s Internet Information Server establishes the first layer of security. Outside partners access a pre-set Internet address that securely connects to the court’s internal network. Once connected, each user enters a personal login and password, providing a second layer of security.

Based on clearly defined criteria, each user’s access to data is controlled by the application through the login process. Different users have different levels of access to data based on their roles in the justice system. The judge, for instance, can view certain screens that a probation officer cannot. Different users also have varying levels of functions: while one user may be able to create, read and delete a record, other users can only read it. Automatic logout and security technology, such as software-based encryption and address-filtering firewall, further protect the system. Lastly, the system provides security by keeping track of all logins and changes made to the system to create an audit trail of all activity by specific users.

Easy-To-Use Application

The domestic violence application is designed to be user-friendly. Even those who are less than fluent with technology quickly become proficient. “Everyone in my court feels very comfortable about using the application,” said Brooklyn Domestic Violence Court Judge John Leventhal. “It was designed for every type of user.”

Because it relies on web technology, the application is easily expanded to include new partners. Off-site partners need only a personal computer, Internet access, and a browser to access the system. The application was also designed to be easily adaptable to courts in different jurisdictions. “Our vision is to roll out the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application — along with the Domestic Violence Court

model — to multiple jurisdictions across the state,” said New York State Chief Administrative Judge Jonathan Lippman. States around the country are also seeking to enhance their response to domestic violence through adaptation of the application.

A National Model

The New York State Unified Court System, through its domestic violence court model, has made significant strides in promoting victim safety and ensuring defendant accountability. A number of factors have contributed to the success of the model, including social services provided by partner agencies — from batterers' intervention programs to victim services and the engagement of the many criminal justice players involved in each case.

The domestic violence application has played a significant role in strengthening these partnerships. In the past, communication was often delayed due to a number of factors including heavy caseloads, missed phone calls and busy fax machines. The technology application has alleviated these problems, allowing for regular and consistent communication among application users. In addition, researchers are exploring ways to harness information from the application's database in order to accurately measure and monitor the court's performance.

Specialized domestic violence courts are currently in operation in numerous jurisdictions around the nation. While the jurisdictions they serve vary greatly in terms of size, geography and type of caseload, certain goals and experiences are universal. Effective domestic violence courts share an emphasis on victim safety, defendant accountability and informed decision-making. Although the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link were created specifically to meet the needs of the New York State Unified Court System, they can serve as a blueprint for any jurisdiction that is interested in streamlining operations and improving data collection. The pages that follow offer a tour of some of the highlights of the domestic violence application, showing how information flows among the application's users and highlighting the ways in which the application has been shaped by the court's needs and principles.

Informed Decision-Making

The Summary Screen brings together all of the key components needed for the court to provide a swift and informed response in each domestic violence case. For example, the judge can access the court appearance history, defendant compliance with mandated programs, the terms and expiration dates of existing orders of protection, case contacts, and the case family profile. The clerk, the resource coordinator, and the court's criminal justice and social service partners also use the summary screen to keep track of each case.

By providing comprehensive information to court players and partners, the application provides the infrastructure for a more coordinated response to domestic violence crime. The application also enables on-site researchers to keep track of case outcomes, court appearance and program compliance rates and conduct statistical analyses. In addition, it helps staff track system outcomes in order to refine and improve court operations.

Detail of Summary Screen, seen on facing page

APPEARANCE HISTORY		PROGRAM COMPLIANCE		FAMILY PROFILE		
Enter Appearance		Date	Attend	Program		
Charge History		8/22/00	■	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	Relationship to victim: spouse	
Enter New Charge		8/8/00	●	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	Living together during incident? No	
Dispose of Charge		8/1/00	●	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	Children in common: 1	
Compliance History		7/25/00	■	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	Other children of victim: 0	
Program Rolodex					Family Court case pending? Yes	
Schedule Defendant					Family Court order in effect? Yes	
Enter Compliance						
Enter New Case						
New Forms						
Form History						
Pending OP						
Search DV Registry						
		ORDERS OF PROTECTION				

Program Compliance The four most recent records of a defendant's compliance with court-ordered programs are laid out in reverse chronological order according to date and program, with color-coded graphics to indicate attendance. Only court staff, district attorneys and the defense attorney assigned to the case have access to this information. A red square signals a report of noncompliance, such as failure to attend a batterers' intervention program, while a green dot indicates compliance. At a glance, users can tell if there is a pattern of non-compliance. A complete history of compliance with program mandates and court appearances, including notes from the program, can be viewed by clicking on the underlined heading of the module itself or the Compliance History link in the Worksheet column on the left of the screen.

Family Profile This section includes information about children in common and possible Family Court involvement of the defendant or victim. It lets the judge know if a case involves issues that may require coordination with Family Court. It has two columns: the district attorney or victim advocate completes the first column, with the victim's consent; the judge completes the second column, with input from the defense attorney in court. The two columns reflect any possible discrepancies between the accounts of victims and defendants.

Worksheet The Worksheet is a navigation bar that provides quick access to a variety of screens. Its menu of links differs for each type of user, depending on the right to view certain information. The Worksheet allows users to get to information directly and quickly, without having to scroll through multiple screens. The Worksheet appears at all times throughout the application, providing users with direct links to information no matter where they are in the application.

Case Contacts The names and phone numbers of key players assigned to each case are listed so that court and partner personnel can quickly access up-to-date contact information.

Summary Screen

<p>Judge WORKSHEET</p> <p>Calendar</p> <p>Summary</p> <p>Court Notes</p> <p>Family Profile</p> <p>Case Contacts</p> <p>Appearance History</p> <p>Enter Appearance</p> <p>Charge History</p> <p>Enter New Charge</p> <p>Dispose of Charge</p> <p>Compliance History</p> <p>Program Rolodex</p> <p>Schedule Defendant</p> <p>Enter Compliance</p> <p>Enter New Case</p> <p>New Forms</p> <p>Form History</p> <p>Pending OP</p> <p>Search DV Registry</p> <p>Log Out</p>	<p>Defendant #: 357 Defendant Name: John K Young NYSID#: 124123412 indictment#: 2914-2000</p>																																							
	<p>DEFENDANT SUMMARY</p>																																							
	<p>CASE</p> <p>Top Charge: ASLT W/INT:PHY INJ W/WEAP 120 .5 .2</p> <p>Adjourned Date/Part: 5/3/01, BDVC I</p> <p>Sentencing Date: None</p>		<p>CASE CONTACTS</p> <p>Defense Attny: Ann Best 718-834-5608</p> <p>Probation Officer: Dean John 732-765-9000</p> <p>District Attny: Courtney Bryan (716)525-8855</p> <p>Victim Advocate: Stephanie Sloan (201)557-6699</p>																																					
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Orders of Protection Summary Essential information and details about active orders of protection can be viewed from the Summary screen. The data include the order number, the issue date, the expiration date, and the protected parties. Through a link on the Worksheet column, court personnel can also search New York State's Domestic Violence Registry for a full history of all orders of protection issued against the defendant throughout the state.

Appearance History This feature makes it easy to track a case's progress. The four most recent court dates, release status, dispositions and the reasons for case adjournments are listed in reverse chronological order. For the complete case history, users can click on the underlined heading of the module itself, or on the Appearance History link on the Worksheet column on the left of the screen.

Defendant Accountability

The New York State domestic violence courts seek to promote victim safety and to closely monitor defendant compliance with court-ordered conditions, including participation in batterers' intervention and other programs. The application promotes these principles by providing information about a defendant's attendance at mandated programs and notes from program staff. Three screens display different levels of compliance information. At the most general level, the Court Calendar screen quickly alerts users to noncompliance with color-coded graphic symbols. At the second level, the Summary Screen (see pages 6 and 7) shows the four most recent entries in the compliance record by date and program. At the third level, the Attendance History Screen (shown below and on the following page) presents in reverse chronological order a detailed history — including all program attendances and court appearances — of a defendant's compliance since the first appearance in court. Compliance History is only available to the court, the defendant's attorney, the district attorney, the probation officer, and the program to which the particular defendant is assigned. With this monitoring of defendants, the court can promptly respond to a defendant's noncompliance by issuing new court orders and/or sanctions; by notifying victim advocates of any potential risks to victims; and by taking the necessary steps to ensure victim safety.

Detail of Attendance Summary Screen

Program Name	Mandate	Court Appearance	Status	Closed Reason	Number Compliant	Number not Compliant
Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	Batterer Program 26 sessions	5/23/2000	Closed	Non-Compliance	5	3

Next Scheduled Court Date: 10/19/2000

Compliance Summary This box displays a quick summary of all programs ordered for a defendant. The viewer can ascertain in one glance the specific programs ordered, program type, the length of time mandated, the defendant's status in specific programs, any reason the defendant is not in the assigned program, and the number of sessions attended and missed. All data are entered by program staff in real time, ensuring prompt notification of noncompliance. More detailed information appears in a separate box on the next page.

Court Appearance The next scheduled court date appears so that the judge can decide whether more immediate action is necessary. For example, the judge may decide to expedite the next appearance.

Detail of Attendance History Screen

DATE	LOCATION			NOTES
	COURT	PROGRAM	SERVICE PROVIDER	
9/20/2000	●			
8/24/2000	●			
8/22/2000		■	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	Client did not attend 8/22 session. He has now missed 3 sessions and has been dropped from the program for not complying with attendance rules. D was advised by the judge and the program not to miss any more programs on his last court date, and was then absent that same week. Court called and expedited next appearance.
8/15/2000	●			
8/8/2000		●	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	D attended 8/8 session.
8/1/2000		●	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	D attended 8/1 session. Has been warned that if one more session is missed he will be terminated from the program.
7/25/2000		■	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	D did not attend 7/25 session
7/20/2000	●			
7/20/2000		●	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	D attended 2 sessions on 6/22/00 and 7/13/00 and missed one session on 6/27/00
6/20/2000		■	Alternatives To Violence Program (ATV)	

Compliance History A breakdown of the defendant’s compliance record by date includes court appearances and participation in all mandated programs. If a defendant fails to appear for a scheduled appointment, the service provider will enter the information and, immediately, a red square will appear on the screen at the court. Similarly, if a defendant is in compliance, a green dot will appear. A column for notes allows programs to provide more detail on defendant compliance. The judge can use this comprehensive visual history of the defendant’s progress to adjust ordered conditions or tailor sanctions.

Victim Safety

To ensure victim safety, the application keeps all key players informed about a case and eliminates communication gaps. Terms and conditions of orders of protection and defendant status are available as soon as the judge orders them. In addition, the court receives immediate reports of alleged non-compliance, violations of protective orders or re-arrests. By creating a centralized information link, the application promotes quick, informed judicial responses and greatly enhances the court's ability to protect victims.

Victim Advocates Report Screen

Defendant Name: John K Young		NYSID#: 124123412	indictment#: 2914-2000
VICTIM ADVOCATES REPORT			
Victim Name:	Judith Young		
Victim Advocate:	Stephanie Sloan		
Order of Protection:	Full		
Has the victim been contacted since the last court appearance?	Yes		
Has the victim reported any violations of the order of protection since the last court appearance?	Yes		
If yes, please describe in as much details as possible. If no, please enter the reason for report.	CW has been receiving harassing phone calls at home. CW states that someone is paging random people and entering the CWs home phone number to call back. These calls come at 12am and 1am. Suspects that it is the defendant. Finds it alarming and annoying.		
Report filed by: Victim Advocate on 9/22/00 12:27:29 PM			
Please Check Here To Confirm <input type="checkbox"/>			

Victim Advocates Report This report form permits victim advocates to notify the court immediately of alleged violations of protective orders and provide other information — with the victim's consent. Once the report is submitted, the application automatically alerts the resource coordinator that there is new information that requires attention, creating a link directly to this report.

Pertinent Information After reviewing the information in the victim advocates report, the resource coordinator can access the full case file for additional information. The resource coordinator can then notify the judge and, if appropriate, expedite a court appearance to take swift action.

Partnerships

Coordinating information between the court, its criminal justice partners and off-site service providers is a formidable task. The domestic violence application streamlines this process by providing a central hub of information. All users access a common electronic workplace. Batterers' intervention programs and probation officers record compliance information. And, with victim consent, victim advocates enter reports of alleged violations of orders of protection. At the same time, partners benefit from viewing case information, changes in court dates, terms of court orders, notices of warrants issued and other developments.

Service Provider's Client Management Screen

Program Name: NYCAAP

Limit List by:

Client Last Name:

Session Day:

Session Hour:

Sort List by:

Client Last Name

Session Day/Hour

Intake Date

Next Court Date

Client List based on **Sort By = Client Last Name**

Case Identifier	Name	Intake Date	Session Day	Session Hour	Next Court Date
UY-454354	Jack Hestor	3/3/00	Tuesday	3:00PM	5/15/00
556644	Adam Holmy	12/1/99			11/23/99
3444SS	Ben O'Conors	1/2/00	Daily		10/10/00
45555569	Carlos Perez	12/12/99	Monday	9:30AM	1/12/01
745852	Ken m Smith	1/25/00	Wednesday	10:00AM	1/26/00
123456567	John E Smith	2/3/00	Tuesday	9:00AM	2/8/00
111111K	Joe K Smith	2/2/00	Tuesday	2:00PM	4/27/00
579851654	Bill Somne	1/10/00		10:00AM	1/15/00
9863XS	James K Teacher	5/1/00			6/1/00

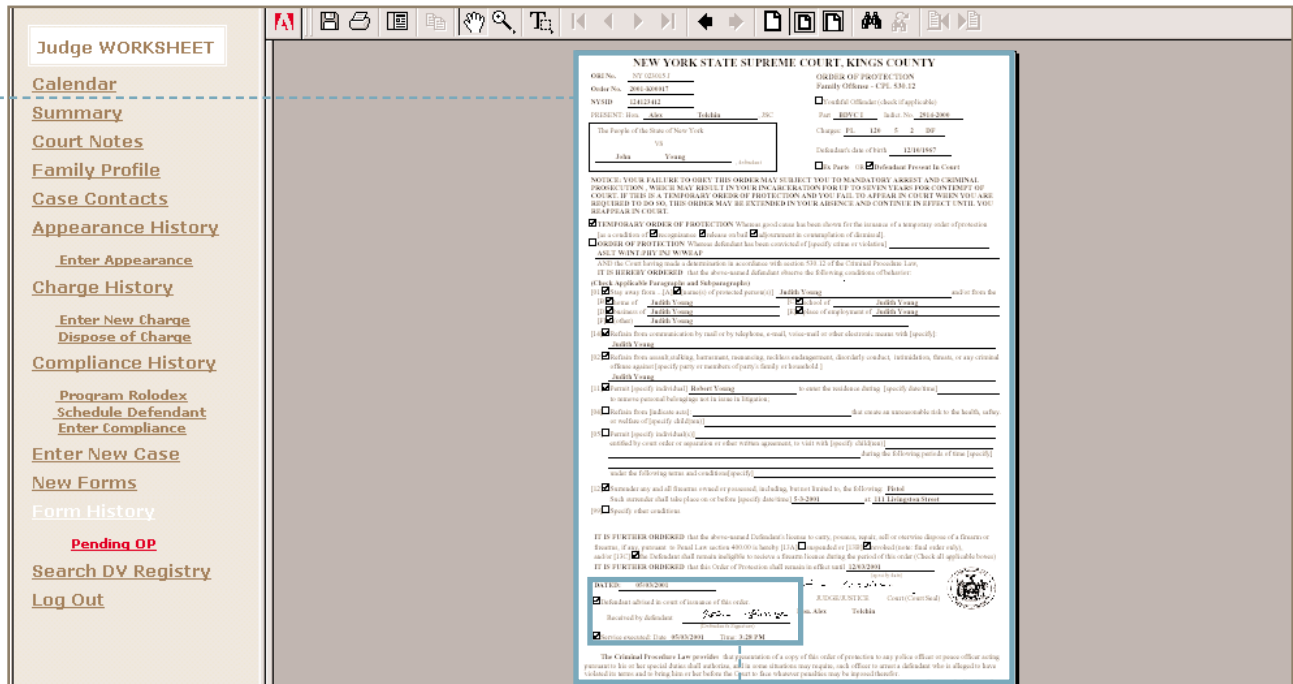
Case Management Service providers, such as batterers' intervention programs, use the application as a management tool. To maintain confidentiality and security, instead of seeing the full court calendar, service providers see only a list of their clients and their respective court dates when they log in. They can sort this list by client's last name, session day/hour, intake date or next court date. This helps them to keep track of large caseloads effectively.

Client List A list of clients is automatically generated for service providers when the resource coordinator uses the application to assign a defendant to a program. This ensures that the program staff is notified of all newly assigned clients referred for intake. A click on the case identifier leads to a compliance entry form, on which the service provider may enter information about a defendant's compliance with court mandates.

Courtroom Efficiency

The application allows real-time communication between the court and off-site partners. This means that new information appears on screen immediately after a user enters it. Zero lag time means more efficient monitoring and increased victim safety.

Pending Order of Protection Screen



Electronic Orders of Protection Orders of protection are created electronically and automatically uploaded to New York State’s Domestic Violence Registry. This eliminates data entry work and ensures accuracy. Creation of orders electronically means that all executed orders are immediately accessible. For example, victim advocates can print out copies of executed orders at any time for their clients and probation officers can access and review the orders with offenders.

Digital Signature The judge and defendant use digital signature pads to sign the electronic order of protection. Once the judge executes an order of protection, its terms cannot be altered by any user.

Conclusion These sample screens from the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link were developed to meet the specific legal and technological needs of the New York State Unified Court System. However, the goals that shaped the application — informed decision-making, defendant accountability, victim safety, partnerships and greater efficiency — are crucial to any domestic violence court. The universal applicability of these goals makes the application a model for all court planners who are interested in using technology to improve the handling of domestic violence cases in their jurisdictions.

Center for Court Innovation

The winner of an Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Center for Court Innovation is a unique public-private partnership that promotes new thinking about how courts can solve difficult problems like addiction, quality-of-life crime, domestic violence and child neglect. The Center functions as the New York State Unified Court System's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new approaches to problems that have resisted conventional solutions. The Center's problem-solving courts include the nation's first community court (Midtown Community Court), as well as drug courts, domestic violence courts, youth courts, family treatment courts and others.

Nationally, the Center disseminates the lessons learned from its experiments in New York, helping courts across the country launch their own problem-solving innovations. The Center contributes to the national conversation about justice by convening roundtable conversations that bring together leading academics and practitioners and by contributing to policy and professional journals. The Center also provides hands-on technical assistance, advising court and criminal justice planners throughout the country about program and technology design.

For more information, call 212 397 3050 or e-mail info@courtinnovation.org.

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A Public/Private Partnership with the
New York State Unified Court System

