AT A GLANCE

Location of Court
Decatur, Georgia

Type of Court

Domestic Violence Civil Court with a specialized protective order calendar, compliance calendar, and domestic violence warrant application calendar

Project Goals

- Keep victims safe and hold batterers accountable
- Create a coordinated community response
- Provide culturally-appropriate judicial intervention

DEKALB COUNTY MAGISTRATE COURT

DeKalb County Magistrate Court primarily handles civil cases on a specialized **Temporary Protective Order Calendar** and on the **Compliance Calendar**. DeKalb County also conducts a stand-alone warrant application hearing calendar for criminal cases involving intimate partners.

CENTER FOR 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

- **Chief magistrate:** supervises the entire court and oversees 10 judges with specialized training assigned to ex-parte hearings, warrant applications for intimate partners, temporary protective orders, and compliance calendars
- **Compliance officer:** monitors attendance and compliance of respondents under a 12-month family violence protective order
- **Domestic violence case coordinator:** supports stand-alone calendars by providing information to presiding judges regarding previous contacts the parties have had with the court, creating hearing calendars, and serving as a point of contact for project partners
- **Clerk of the Superior Court:** Deputy Clerk handles all the documents and files that are produced by temporary protective order filings
- **DeKalb County Sheriff's Office:** deputies from the Domestic Violence Unit serve protective orders, seize and store weapons, and also provide security for the judges, staff, and parties

CASE MANAGEMENT

Types of cases: The DeKalb County Magistrate Court hears civil protective order cases involving family violence and stalking. All temporary protective order cases are heard by designated magistrate court judges who sit as superior court judges. All have received specialized domestic violence training by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. In rare cases, the superior court judge to whom the case is assigned may choose to hear the case in conjunction with an already open civil case.

Case identification, screening, and transfer: The screening for the warrant application hearing occurs when applicants submit their paper application to the on-duty judge in the DeKalb County Magistrate Criminal office.

Information Sharing: DeKalb County Magistrate Court employs a full-time domestic violence case coordinator through an Office on Violence Against Women grant. The domestic violence case coordinator is present for all calendars and provides the presiding judge with information about previous contact that the parties have had with the court, prior to the hearing.

Schedule: Temporary protective order calendars are held every Tuesday and Wednesday. Warrant Applications for intimate partners are held on the first and third Mondays of each month. Compliance calendars are held biweekly.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Frequency of stakeholder meetings: Quarterly or as needed

List of stakeholders: The compliance officer regularly meets with family violence intervention program providers to discuss programming and any concerns about the progress of the project. The court also organizes an annual training for all family violence intervention programs providers. Additionally, the court meets with the Women's Resource Center to End Domestic Violence,

Tapestri (victim services agency), DeKalb Sheriff's Office, and the DeKalb Volunteer Lawyers Foundation to review policies and practices.

VICTIM SAFETY

Court security: The party that initiates the case and the person against whom the case has been filed are kept separate throughout the hearing process. An advocate from the Women's Resource Center facilitates discussion without the parties having contact. The petitioning party is also allowed to leave the courtroom first, with at least a ten-minute period before the responding party is released. Sheriff escorts are also available for parties who feel unsafe leaving the courtroom alone. This process is followed for temporary protective order calendars and warrant applications. Finally, the court also includes a secure public entrance with metal detectors and x-ray screening.

Victim services: The Women's Resource Center works directly with petitioners to provide on-site legal advocacy and safety planning. An advocate is in the courthouse to provide assistance when the petitioner appears at the filing window. That advocate can also help them with applying for a criminal warrant, safety planning, and connect them with appropriate community resources.

Tapestri provides culturally-responsive resources in cases where the petitioner has limited English proficiency. If petitioners have not made contact with Tapestri prior to coming to the courthouse, then they are provided with contact information for Tapestri when they speak to the ex-parte judge. Live interpreters are provided by the court for all hearings where a need has been identified. Additionally, a language line is routinely available to serve as a backup resource and assist limited English proficient litigants while communicating with court staff outside of court hearings.

Supervised visitation and safe exchange: The court orders parties to use a local supervised visitation and safe exchange center (Nia's Place) after their 12-month hearing.

OFFENDER ACCOUNTABLITY

Compliance reviews: Compliance calendars are held every two weeks, twice a month. Immediately following the 12-month hearing, respondents are given a court date that is approximately one month away to allow them to comply with the requirement that they register and enroll with a family violence intervention program within 21 days. Subsequent court dates are scheduled on a bi-weekly basis and are in addition to bi-weekly check-ins via phone/e-mail.

Offender services: When a 12-month order is issued, respondents are required to enroll in a state-certified family violence intervention program. The court also has a relationship with DeKalb Workforce Development and the Georgia Department of Labor that allows respondents to enroll in their job search program with weekly progress reports sent to the court's compliance officer. Additionally, the court maintains a list of community resources, including housing and social service providers.

LEGAL SERVICES

In cases where respondents appear at the 12-month hearing with counsel and petitioners are unrepresented, an attorney from the DeKalb Volunteer Lawyers Foundation will screen petitioners to determine if they qualify for representation. If the petitioner does qualify then representation is provided for that hearing at no cost to the petitioner.

TRAINING

Court staff has provided training that includes:

- An annual training for family violence intervention programs on policy and procedures surrounding the compliance project, including the process for becoming an approved service provider
- An open house for other courts on best practices
- Regular trainings for local law enforcement regarding best practices in handling domestic violence calls

This project was supported by Grant No. 2014-TA-AX-K019 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

Special thanks to the DeKalb County Magistrate Court staff for their assistance in creating this publication.