



Keeping Your Courthouse Safe: Domestic Violence & Court Security

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Nathan Hall, *National Center for State Courts*
Ron Rogers, *Yakima County Sheriff's Office*
Nida Abbasi, Center for Court Innovation

Learning Objectives

As a result of this workshop, you will be better able to:

- ▶ Identify foundational security considerations in domestic violence cases.
- ▶ Describe practical strategies for courthouse safety when cases involve domestic violence and apply to individual jurisdiction

What's Your Role

- Judge
- Court Staff
- Attorney
- Advocate
- Law Enforcement
- Probation
- Supervised Visitation Provider
- Other

Welcome & Overview

- Introductions
- Project Overview
- White Paper: *Recommended Court Security Measures for Domestic Violence Cases*

What Does “Court Security” Include?

Three basic facets:

- Architectural elements
- Operating procedures and staffing
- Equipment and technology

Court Security: Foundational Elements

- Security Committee
- Policies & Procedures
- Threat & Incident Reporting
- Security Training

Poll: Court Security

Do you have these components in your courthouse?

- Security Committee
- Policies & Procedures
- Threat & Incident Reporting
- Security Training
- All of the above

Unique Security Needs for Domestic Violence Cases

Why is court security particularly important for domestic violence cases?

- ▶ Judges and court staff have stated that domestic violence cases are among the cases with the highest potential for violence in the courthouse.
- ▶ A courthouse analysis showed that out of 185 incidents of courthouse and judicial violence attacks committed between 2003 – 2013, DV litigants were the most commonly-cited threat source.

Poll: Ongoing Challenges

What are your biggest challenges to court security with DV cases?

- Lack of coordination to meet and discuss
- Lack of training options for court security
- Unfamiliar with policies and procedures re: court security
- Lack of prioritization on the issue
- Physical structure of courthouse hinders safety
- Other issues (please click and type into chat box)

Court Security & Domestic Violence

There are key differences between general courthouse security and security for DV cases.

Why is This Important?

Safety issues with DV cases

- Coercive control
- Stalking
- Escalation of violence
- Risk of further violence & lethality
- Risk to victim & court staff

Discussion Questions

Does your court prioritize court security in DV cases

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

Initial Steps

What steps can courts take to address DV-specific security concerns?

Practical Strategies: Security Working Group

1. Establish a security working group
 - Identify and assess DV-specific risks
 - Identify ways to address risks
 - Develop implementation plan, including costs associated with improvements

Case Scenario 1

Your court recently experienced a security breach related to a domestic violence case. Court leadership has decided to improve current safety policies and procedures and wants to establish a working group with a variety of stakeholders.

- What stakeholders would be involved?
- What would the work group's action items be?

Practical Strategies: Policies & Procedures

2. Improve current policies & procedures

- Security threat risk evaluation
- Security officer escorts
- Staggering of litigant arrivals and departures from courthouse
- Separation of parties
- Virtual tools

Case Scenario 2

Court staff, advocates, and other stakeholders receive information about a potentially hostile situation related to an upcoming court date.

How can stakeholders share this type of information with the court?

Practical Strategies: Threat Assessment & Evaluation

- Promote regular communication between court staff around communicating threats and incidents
- Establish protocols for maintaining and sharing appropriate information via reporting protocol that includes all stakeholders
- Develop a DV threat evaluation form that includes evidence-based risk factors – provide form with PO petitions
- Train court staff on recognizing DV threats and behaviors
- Track data

Staff Training

1. Do you provide DV training to court staff?

- Yes
- No

2. Is it on an ongoing basis?

- Yes
- No

3. Are court security a part of these training?

- Yes
- No

Practical Strategies: Training for Court Security

- Offer foundational court security training as part of the onboarding process.
- Consider ongoing training on a variety of topics, including:
 - Trauma-informed practice
 - Managing high-risk situations
 - Self-defense and bystander safety
 - Vicarious trauma

Physical Safety and Security

What practical improvements could you make to your courthouse to improve safety and security for DV cases?

Practical Strategies: Courtroom Layout & Design

- Think about physical structure of courthouse, courtrooms, and surrounding area
 - Always have security present and aware of high risk cases and circumstances
 - Enough space to separate parties and stagger them in and out of courtroom and courthouse
 - If possible, consider having DV cases heard on ground/lower floors
 - Trauma-informed design – lighting, signage, open spaces, maps, noise, etc.

Practical Strategies: Public Areas

- Usage of virtual proceedings
- Presence of security in waiting areas and common areas in courthouse
- Emergency exit plans for litigants and staff
- Staff should have clear line of view to litigants
- Security cameras
- Non-contact interview booths
- “DV Service Navigator” or similar role
- Alternative meeting locations beyond courthouse

Practical Strategies: Courthouse Perimeter

- Security staffed near doors and perimeter
- Think about physical structure of courthouse, courtrooms, and surrounding area
- Utilize alternative exit and entrance points as needed
- Provide perimeter lighting, cameras, and security
- Provide security between courthouse and public transportation

Practical Strategies: Virtual Hearings

- Research privacy settings and assign staff to control virtual courtroom and prevent unwanted screen-sharing, hacking, and/or disruptions
- Presence of advocate and ability to speak privately to litigant
- Ensure litigants are not left alone in virtual room
- Inform litigants if meeting is “public” and/or recorded and available to the public

Any Questions?

Contact Us

Nathan Hall, Principal Consultant, *National Center for State Courts* - nhall@ncsc.org

Ronald Rogers, Deputy, *Yakima County Sheriff's Office* - Ronald.Rogers@co.yakima.wa.us

Nida Abbasi, Manager, Gender & Family Justice – abbasin@courtinnovation.org

www.courtinnovation.org

www.ncsc.org

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