

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 proper—totaling nearly one million residents.)

Type of Court

Civil Court operating under Domestic Relations Services

Project Goals

Increase safety for victims and their children who are going through the OP process;

Increase accountability for domestic violence offenders; 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 and 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 three monthly OP contempt dockets and two monthly Judicial Monitoring dockets.



COURT STAFF

- **DV Court Manager:** Provides all administrative oversight of the DV Court operations, including: staff supervision; grant writing/reporting; and development and refinement of program policies/procedures. Coordinates and facilitates regular meetings between DV Court judiciary, staff and other Court stakeholders.
- **DV Court Coordinator:** Coordinates and provides case management for the operations of the DV Court's regular OP dockets and OP contempt dockets. Attends all DV Court dockets and supports judges/division staff, program staff, volunteers and litigants participating in the

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.

- **DV Court Victim Assistance Coordinator:** Coordinates services such as safety planning, resource referrals and crisis intervention/support for victims as they proceed through OP process. Provides training and oversight to volunteer victim advocates, and case management/follow-up services to victims.
- **DV Court Compliance Coordinator:** Oversees the compliance program for DV Court respondents ordered to participate in special conditions such as Batterer's Intervention Programming, Substance Abuse Counseling and/or to Relinquish Firearms. Assists respondents with connecting to community programming and reporting back to the court on compliance with special conditions.
- **DV Court Compliance Case Manager:** Assists the Compliance Coordinator with case management of respondents ordered to participate in special conditions (noted above).
- **DV Court Volunteer Coordinator:** Recruits, screens and on-boards individual community volunteer advocates, professional advocates from community stakeholders and attorneys who volunteer on DV Court dockets. Professional advocates are regularly supplied by ALIVE, YWCA and Crime Victim Center. Manages volunteers' schedules and coordinates volunteers' ongoing training.
- **DV Court Judges:** (1) Five judges who preside over weekly DV Court OP dockets; (2) Two judges who preside over bi-monthly contempt dockets; (3) Two judges who preside over bi-monthly Judicial Monitoring dockets for special conditions, such as Batterer's Intervention Programming, Substance Abuse evaluation and/or Firearm Relinquishment.
- **Other Court Personnel:** (1) OP Office/DV Court Division Clerks; (2) Courtroom Bailiffs/Security Officers

CASE MANAGEMENT

Types of cases: Civil OP's involving former or current intimate partners; Civil Judicial Monitoring/compliance cases; OP Civil Contempt (for respondents' non-compliance with special conditions (ex. Firearm Relinquishment) ordered in an OP); and OP Indirect Criminal Contempt (for respondents' violation of Full OP through contact(s) with the victim).

Case identification, screening, and transfer: Cases are routed to the DV Court dockets based on the relationship indicated by the petitioner on the OP petition. DV Court staff and volunteers review every petition assigned to the DV Court, and make note of those that are considered high-risk (as evaluated using best-practices and research done by Jacquelyn Campbell) based on the allegations. Due to the Family Court’s “one family/one judge” policy, DV judges handle any companion dissolution/custody cases as well. OP cases are transferred to the contempt dockets when either compliance staff have reported non-compliance with special conditions (Civil Contempt) *or* a petitioner has filed a Motion alleging that respondent has made contact(s) with him/her (Indirect Criminal Contempt).

Information sharing: The Missouri Case Net system allows Court personnel to access statewide information about litigants, such as related open/pending cases in domestic court, juvenile court and/or criminal court. There is also a significant level of coordination and collaboration between DV Court staff and program staff in other sectors of the County court system. Additionally, when an OP is entered by a judge it is also entered into REJIS and MULES (Missouri Uniform Law Enforcement System), which allows law enforcement to access OPs and their specific rulings.

Schedule: DV Court weekly OP dockets are held on Monday mornings (9:00am) and afternoons (1:30pm); Wednesday mornings (9:00am); and Thursday mornings (9:00am) and afternoons (1:30pm). DV Court contempt dockets are held on two Fridays/month (1:00pm). DV Court Judicial Monitoring Dockets are held one two Wednesday/month (1:30pm).¹

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Frequency of stakeholder meetings: Monthly; Bi-monthly

List of stakeholders: Victim 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, representatives from Prosecuting Attorney’s Office

¹ Having only ceased court operations for a short amount of time, the St. Louis County Courthouse rapidly established an online filing option for Orders of protection as well as the ability to appear virtually for court dates. We have also created an “e-court” for parties that do not have access to electronic devices with which to appear virtually for court. Located on the street level, with bailiffs present, the e-court is comprised of numerous desktops with WebEx capabilities. Furthermore, St. Louis County recently established a satellite location at Northwest Crossing, located in St. Ann which is geographically closer to the majority of petitioners. At The Crossing, petitioners will be able to file for OPs as well as appear virtually using the e-court placed there.

VICTIM SAFETY

Court security: The St. Louis County courthouse has a secured building entrance that includes weapons screening via metal detectors and X-ray machines. The DV courtroom is located on the street level, just steps away from the security office. Litigants are always seated on separate sides of the courtroom, and departure following court is staggered with the petitioner/victim leaving first, and the respondent/abuser being held for 15 minutes. Every DV Court docket is staffed by two courtroom bailiffs and a security officer who monitors the hallway outside of the courtroom and assists with arranging an officer escort to walk victims to their vehicle or public transportation when necessary.

Victim services: Victim advocates are available to victims throughout the OP process. Advocates offer emotional support/crisis intervention, information about the OP process, safety planning, and community resource referrals. An advocate through the **Crime Victim Center (CVC)** is available to assist victims when they come into the OP Office to file their petition. The **DV Court Victim Assistance Coordinator**, as well as DV Court volunteer victim advocates and professional advocates from **CVC, ALIVE** and **YWCA**, are available at all DV Court dockets and between court appearances. In addition, DV Court advocates conduct telephone follow-up with victims upon the conclusion of their court case(s). Additionally, victim advocates will coordinate with advocates in the prosecutor's office, when necessary, to best support survivors going through criminal cases alongside the civil OP proceedings.

Supervised visitation: Supervised visitation and safe custody exchanges are available through the Family Court's Domestic Relations Services (DRS) department and the Exchange Center program. DRS employs a domestic violence screening on all incoming referrals.

Risk Assessment: All incoming DV Court OP petitions are screened by DV Court staff or trained advocates to identify victims/cases that are high-risk based on domestic violence risk and lethality research/indicators, such as a history of strangulation, rape, threatening with a firearm, etc. within the relationship. The identified high-risk cases are highlighted to ensure that those petitioners have contact with an advocate as immediately as possible. There is also a bench-card that discusses risk for when judges are making decision on Ex-Parte Orders as well as Full OPs.

OFFENDER ACCOUNTABILITY

Compliance reviews: If an offender is ordered to special condition programming (i.e. batterers intervention program (BIP), substance abuse evaluation/treatment and/or firearm relinquishment), then s/he will routinely be scheduled for compliance review hearings with a Judicial Monitoring judge and DV Court compliance program staff. The frequency of an

offender's compliance hearings is determined on a case-by-case basis. Non-compliance with special condition programming will result in the case being transferred to the DV 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.

Offender services: Offenders are regularly ordered to participate in special condition programming, which can include one or more of the following:

Batterer's Intervention Program: BIP programming is offered through community-based providers. Offenders must complete an orientation meeting with DV Court compliance staff to select one of three programs, all of which are minimum of 26 weeks but range in cost. Compliance staff are in regular communication with offenders and programs so that compliance (or lack thereof) information can be presented to the Judicial Monitoring judges.

Substance Abuse Evaluation/Treatment: Offenders must complete a substance abuse evaluation and subsequent recommended treatment when ordered by the court, usually in cases where the petitioner alleges substance abuse during the course of a hearing and as a contributing factor of the abuse alleged. Compliance staff are in regular communication with offenders and substance abuse treatment programs so that compliance (or lack thereof) information can be presented to the Judicial Monitoring judges.

Firearm Relinquishment: Offenders can be ordered to: (1) Not possess any firearms for the duration of the Full OP; and/or (2) Relinquish any firearms currently in their possession for the duration of the Full OP. If there is credible evidence that the respondent is in possession of firearms, the judge will require him/her to relinquish the firearms to either a verified third party (who must complete a notarized or sworn Third Party Affidavit) or to St. Louis County Law Enforcement. Offenders required to relinquish firearms must appear in front of a Judicial Monitoring judge and complete a sworn statement verifying their relinquishment of firearms (with proof) *or* their non-possession of firearms. If a respondent is found to possess firearms during the time that the Full OP is in effect, s/he can be found to be in Indirect Criminal Contempt or criminally charged.

Volunteer Special Private Prosecuting Attorney's (SPA's) are available to prosecute respondents' alleged violations of their Full OP on DV Court's Indirect Criminal Contempt (ICC) and Civil Contempt dockets. The Family Court also employs a **Defense Attorney** available to represent indigent respondents at all DV Court contempt dockets.

LEGAL SERVICES

Legal Services of Eastern Missouri (LSEM) has an advocate present in the OP Office two days/week to offer on-site, immediate access to the LSEM intake process for victims. In addition, advocates regularly refer victims to community-based legal aid services.

TRAINING

- *St. Louis County DV Court Orientation* – “in house” training provided to incoming/new DV Court judges and their division staff (i.e. clerks and bailiffs)
- *Safety and Security in DV Court* – “in-house” training provided to DV Court bailiffs and security officers
- *Domestic Violence and Orders of Protection* – “in-house” training for OP Office clerks
- *After-Hours/Emergency Orders of Protection* – training/deputization for St. Louis County and Municipal Law Enforcement Officers
- *Domestic Violence and Advocacy* – training for incoming cadets, St. Louis County Police Academy
- *MO Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (MO-AFCC)* – DV Court has presented at several AFCC events, including “lunch and learn” events and the AFCC annual conference
- *Specialized DV Trainings for Volunteer Attorneys* – “in-house” trainings offered annually to Family Law attorneys who volunteer as Court Attorneys on weekly DV Court dockets and/or as Special Prosecuting Attorneys on DV Court contempt dockets.

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