



The 2019 Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT) Annual Report provides a summary of the Review Team's activities and accomplishments over the last year. This report contains statistical data for the domestic violence fatalities that occurred in calendar year 2018, as well as information and recommendations from the fatal cases reviewed by FIRT in 2018. This report is a supplement to the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Annual Report which is published in the fall of each year.

In 2018, the team held a domestic violence fatality review and a near death review. In addition to the reviews, members of the fatal incident review team met with Dr. Neil Websdale, the Director of the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI). During this meeting, Dr. Websdale discussed work being done on the national levels with the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) and how Delaware's FIRT can contribute to building a uniform reporting method (system) for domestic violence fatalities. The team has committed to provide representation to the national team initiative, including representing Delaware at the first meeting scheduled for June 2019 in Flagstaff, Arizona.

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**“BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT  
TO SEE IN THE WORLD”**  
-MOHANDAS GANDHI

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT) was established by statute in 1996 and became the first statewide team in the country. FIRT members are dedicated professionals who conduct examinations of State agencies and private organizations that had contact with the victim and/or the perpetrator to assess the system's response. Although domestic violence fatality reviews are retrospective in nature, their purpose is prospective. Reviews focus on identifying trends, patterns and obstacles in services, assessing agency interventions, and, most importantly, developing practical recommendations aimed at improving the system and preventing future injury and death. In 2009, the General Assembly granted FIRT the authority to conduct near-death reviews. These reviews enhance the team's ability to improve Delaware's response to domestic violence with the wealth of knowledge that can be gained from speaking directly with the domestic violence survivor about the incident, the history of violence, system involvement, and awareness of resources.

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### **FIRT Co-Chairs**

The Honorable Vincent J. Poppiti  
The Honorable Jan R. Jurden  
Professor Dana Harrington Conner

### **FIRT Members**

In accordance with 13 Del. C. § 2105, in addition to the co-chairs, the Review Team shall consist of :

- The Attorney General or the Attorney General's designee;
- The Chief Defender or the Chief Defender's designee;
- The Director of the Division of Family Services or the Director's designee;
- The President Judge of the Superior Court, or the President Judge's designee;
- The Chief Judge of the Family Court or the Chief Judge's designee;
- The Chief Magistrate of the Justice of the Peace Courts or the Chief Magistrate's designee;
- The Director of the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, or the Director's designee;
- The Commissioner of the Department of Correction or the Commissioner's designee;
- A law-enforcement officer to be appointed by the Delaware Police Chiefs' Council;
- A treatment provider from a certified batterers' intervention program appointed by the Council;
- Two victim advocates appointed by the Council; and,
- A victim of domestic violence appointed by the Council.

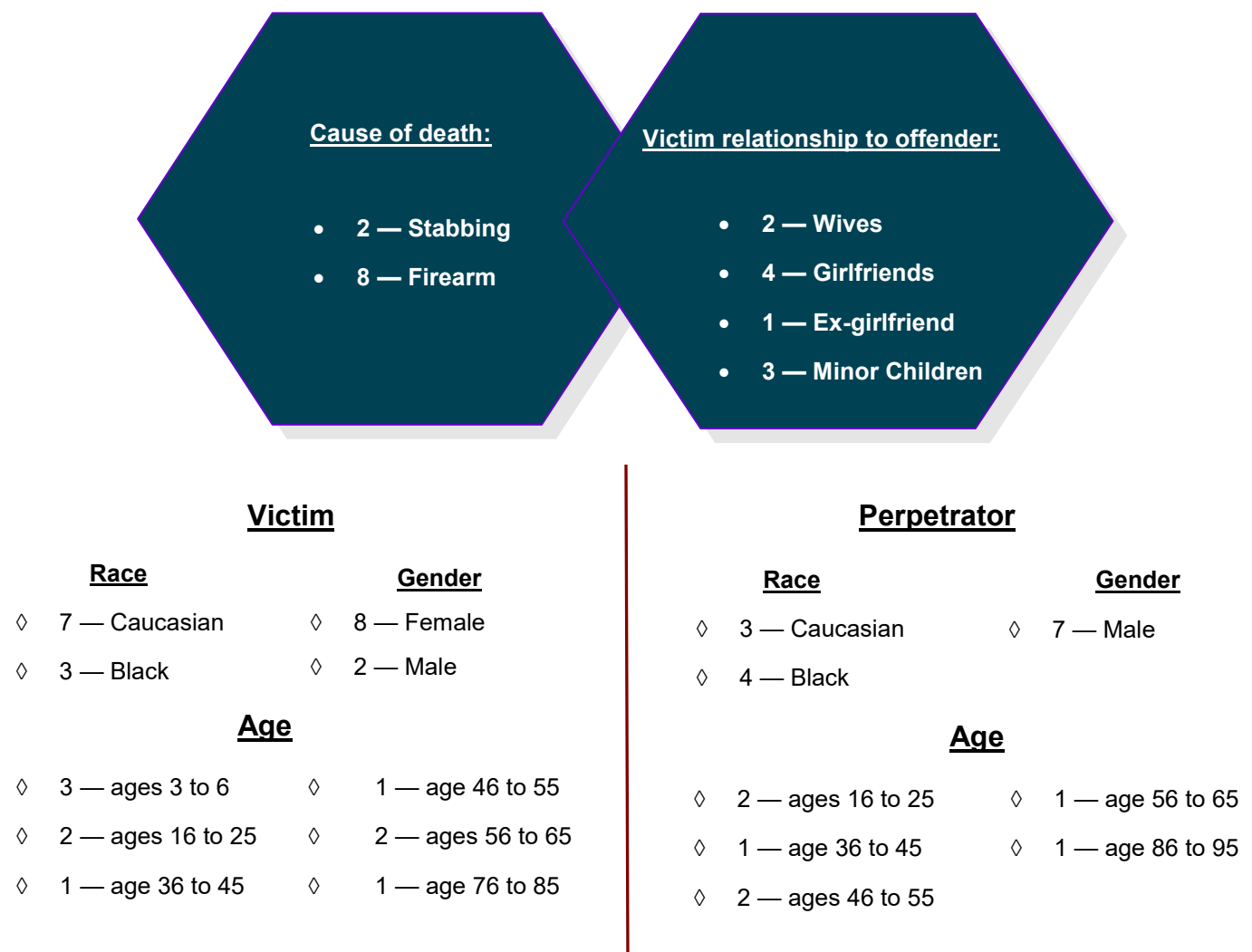
All members of the Review Team, as well as other individuals invited to participate, are considered part of the review panel for a particular case or incident. The Review Team frequently invites law enforcement personnel to participate in any case in which the agency investigated the death, near-death or had involvement with the victim prior to the domestic violence incident under review. The Review Team may also invite the participation of individuals with particular expertise that would be helpful to the review panel, or representatives from organizations or agencies that had contact with or provided services to the individual prior to that individual's own death or near-death, that individual's abusive partner or family member and/or the alleged perpetrator of the death or near-death.

## Domestic Violence-Related Deaths

The DVCC tracks domestic violence-related deaths that occur throughout the State of Delaware. These domestic violence-related deaths include victims, perpetrators, or by-standers if the death was a result of domestic violence, either intimate partner violence or between family members. Out of the 2018 domestic violence-related homicides, one perpetrator was released on unsecured bail and had a current no contact order with the victim.

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Incidents of domestic violence homicide	7	6	9	6	11
Victims of domestic violence homicide (excluding by legal intervention)	10	6	9	6	8
Homicides by legal intervention (responding law enforcement)	0	0	0	1	1
All domestic violence-related homicides	10	6	9	7	9
Perpetrator suicide (excluding by legal intervention)	5	2	4	1	4
Total deaths (victim and perpetrator)	15	8	13	8	13

**\*The demographics of the 10 domestic violence homicide victims in 2018 were as follows:**



**\*These cases have not been reviewed by the Fatal Incident Review Team\***

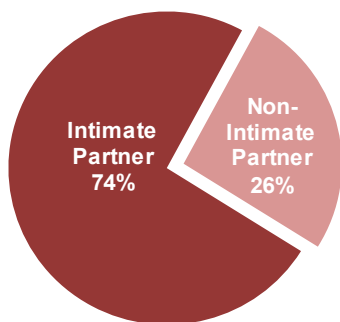
## Domestic Violence-Related Deaths

This portion of the report is a collection of data from 137 domestic violence fatal incident reviews conducted by FIRT between 1996 and 2018. These reviews included cases where prosecution was completed and the Department of Justice authorized FIRT to conduct a final review. **The cases reviewed do not reflect all domestic violence homicides or near-deaths in Delaware since 1996.** Of the 137 fatal incident reviews, there were 171 domestic violence-related deaths and 3 near-deaths.

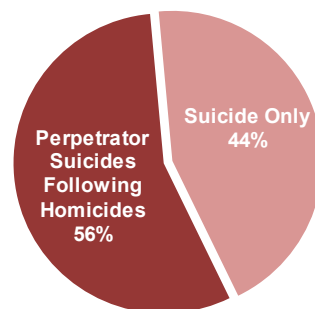
### Domestic Violence-Related Deaths and Near-Deaths

Homicide Victims	117
Perpetrator Suicides Following Homicides	30
Suicide Only	23
Undetermined Victim Deaths*	1
Near-Death	3

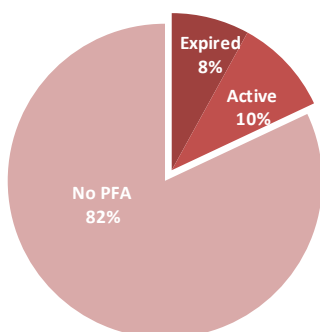
**Homicide Victims  
1996 - 2018**



**Suicide Deaths  
1996 - 2018**



**Victims with Protection  
from Abuse Orders**



In the 137 cases reviewed by FIRT, 124 children lost a parent to domestic violence homicide and two children were impacted by the near-death of a parent.

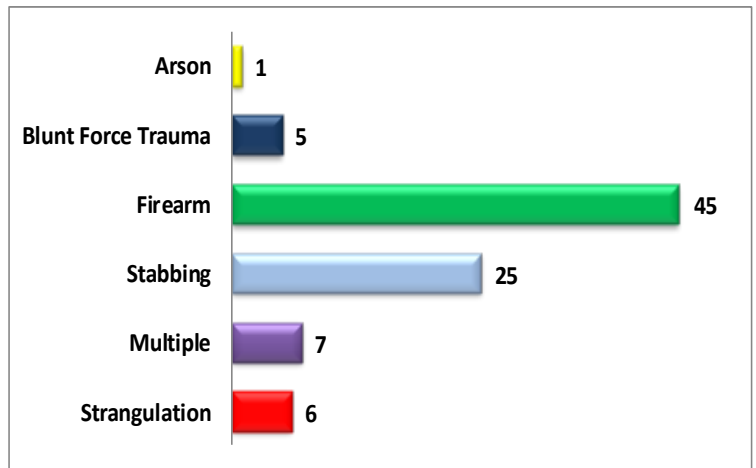
\* If a case lacks a clear indicator as to whether or not the death was intentionally caused by another or accidental, the case will remain suspicious in nature and the exact manner of death will be undetermined.

## Intimate Partner Data

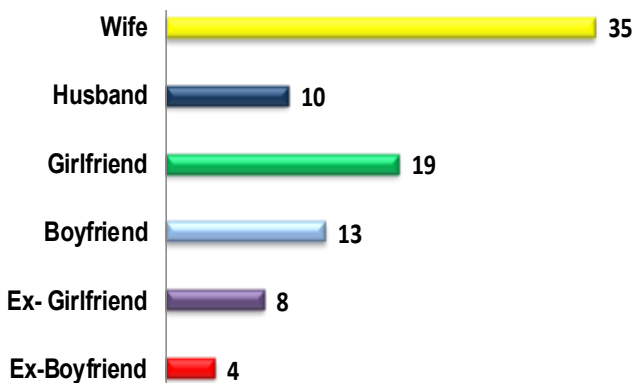
Of the 117 homicide victims and 3 near-death victims reviewed by FIRT, 89 victims or 76% of the homicides occurred in a past or present intimate partner relationship. The term "intimate partner" includes current and former spouses, current and former dating couples with or without a child in common, and teen dating couples. Intimate partners may be of the same gender.

**Out of 86 intimate partner homicides or near-deaths, 48% of the homicides occurred when a victim attempted to leave or had ended a relationship with the perpetrator.**

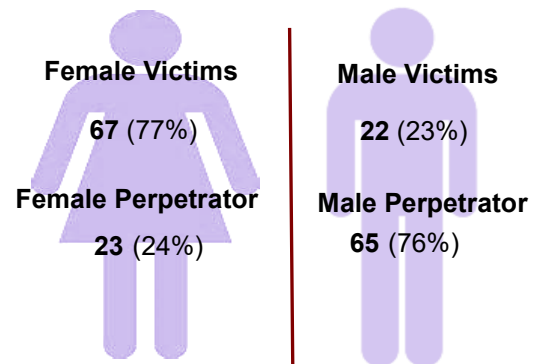
Victim Cause of Death



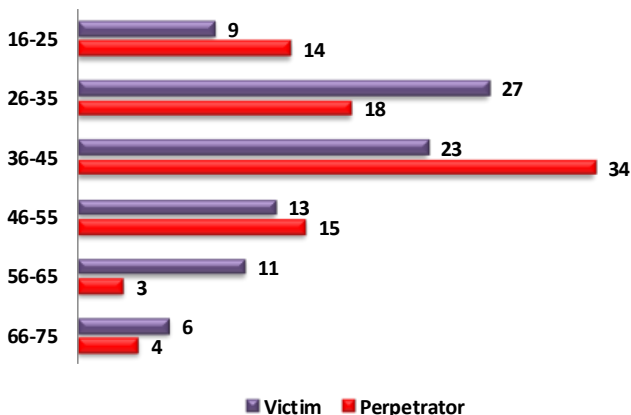
Victim Relationship to Offenders



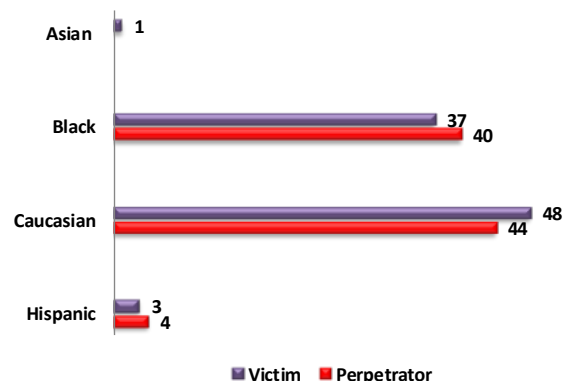
Victims & Perpetrators by Gender



Victims & Perpetrators Age at Time of Incident



Victims & Perpetrator by Race



## Non-Intimate Partner Data

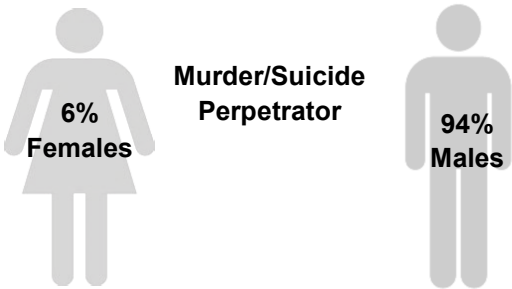
Domestic violence-related deaths between non-intimate partners include individuals with a familial relationship such as parent/child or sibling relationship.

Of the 117 homicide victims included in this report, 30 victims were “non-intimate partners.” Also included in these homicide numbers are victims who were bystanders (acquaintances or strangers).

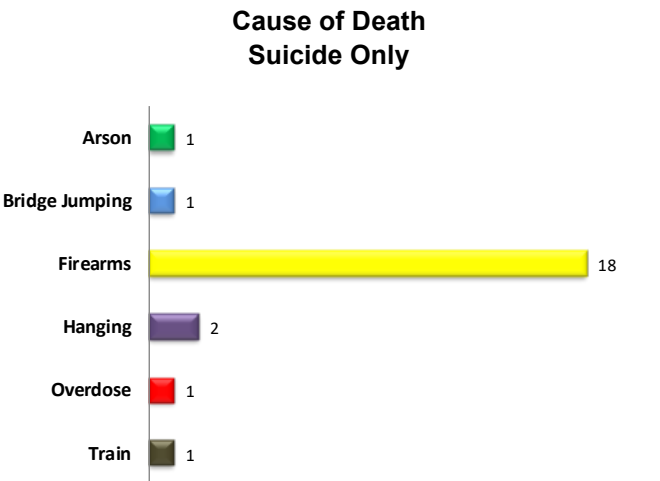


## Suicide Data

Of the 171 domestic violence-related deaths included in this report, there were 30 perpetrator suicides following a homicide or murder/suicide. Out of the 30 murder/suicide cases reviewed, 28 of the perpetrators were male and 2 were female.



“Domestic violence-related suicides” are counted separately from the murder/suicide cases. The suicide only cases are victims or perpetrators who have taken their own lives and have a significant history of abuse by or toward their partner. There were a total of 24 domestic violence-related suicides, including one undetermined death where it could not be concluded if it was accidental or a suicide.



## FIRT Follow Ups, Recommendations & Responses

The ultimate purpose for reviewing domestic violence fatalities is to reduce the incidence of such deaths. At the end of each case review and following the presentation of information, Review Team members are asked if they have any recommendations for improving the system response to domestic violence.

The 2019 FIRT recommendation was sent to the relevant agency. Prior year FIRT recommendations are also listed in the report with 2019 updates. The responses to the recommendations are listed in the report in **BOLD**.

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council is extremely grateful to the participating agencies for their commitment towards improving the system's response to domestic violence. We are fortunate to have the high level of cooperation demonstrated by the agencies' responses to the Fatal Incident Review Team's recommendations.

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## 2019 Recommendation and Response

### **1. 2019 Recommendation:**

The DVCC shall explore opportunities for large scale public service announcements and promotion of domestic violence resources, especially to new or relocating residents in Delaware.

### **Response:**

DVCC staff will research costs and develop a plan to implement a large scale public service announcement and promotion of domestic violence resources throughout the state. The staff will prioritize and focus on areas targeting individuals relocating to Delaware.

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## 2018 Recommendations and Responses

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COORDINATING COUNCIL**

#### **1. 2018 Recommendation:**

The DVCC shall implement and sustain ongoing training to the Bench and Bar on the issues relating to the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault.

#### **Response:**

The DVCC staff will explore avenues to seek input from the Bench and Bar to identify training needs. The Training Committee will explore developing curriculum and conduct training as appropriate.

#### **2019 FIRT Report Update:**

**The DVCC Training Committee is examining ways to effectively distribute information to the Bench and Bar and continues to have ongoing conversation on this topic.**

#### **2. 2018 Recommendation:**

The DVCC shall implement and sustain ongoing training to the Medical Community (especially Women and Children as well as emergency care) on the issues relating to the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault.

#### **Response:**

The DVCC staff will work with the Medical and Training Committees to explore opportunities to provide training and education on domestic violence and sexual assault.

#### **2019 FIRT Report Update:**

**The DVCC Medical Committee was reestablished in December 2018. The above mentioned FIRT recommendation will be forwarded to this committee.**

### **3. 2018 Recommendation:**

The DVCC should explore implementing and sustaining large scale awareness campaigns on domestic violence and sexual assault in multiple languages.

### **Response:**

DVCC staff will explore various outreach campaigns and media campaigns that provide information and support around healthy relationships and abuse (to promote reporting options, hotline numbers, community resources, safety planning, etc.)

### **2019 FIRT Report Update**

**The DVCC staff will research costs and develop a plan to implement and sustain a large scale awareness campaign on domestic violence and sexual assault in multiple languages.**

### **4. 2018 Recommendation:**

The DVCC shall communicate with the Delaware Police Chiefs' Council and the Department of Justice regarding participation of key personnel during the Fatal Incident Review Team process.

### **Response:**

The FIRT continually seeks to improve its process and there is much to be learned from these cases to better identifying points of intervention and how to improve system response to family violence. DVCC staff will meet with the leadership of the Delaware Police Chiefs' Council and the Department of Justice to communicate the importance and value of each discipline's participation in the review process.

### **2019 FIRT Report Update:**

**DVCC staff communicated with the Delaware Police Chiefs' Council and the Department of Justice and both organizations have representatives that are committed to attending and contributing to the Fatal Incident Review Team.**

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COORDINATING COUNCIL

1. **2017 Recommendation:**

The DVCC shall research outreach efforts and education by national agencies to employers on domestic violence including stalking.

**Response:**

DVCC staff will research national agencies outreach efforts and education to employers on domestic violence including stalking. DVCC staff will present the research at an upcoming 2017 FIRT meeting.

**2018 FIRT Report Update:**

DVCC staff reached out to the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI) regarding best practices and research on this topic. Additional information will be presented to the Fatal Incident Review Team after consulting with the NDVFRI.

**2019 FIRT Report Update:**

**DVCC staff will continue conversations with the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI) regarding best practices and research on this topic. Information will continue to be provided to the FIRT.**

2. **2017 Recommendation:**

The DVCC will explore opportunities for a Needs Assessment (including focus groups) with the Hispanic Community in Delaware.

**Response:**

The DVCC will explore the possibility of a needs assessment in the Hispanic Community in Delaware as it relates to services provided to those affected by domestic violence.

**2018 FIRT Report Update:**

The DVCC will explore opportunities for a Needs Assessment in the Hispanic Community through the DVCC Immigration Committee. This committee will include this topic on their March 2018 meeting agenda.

**2019 FIRT Report Update:**

**The DVCC Immigration Committee Meeting recently had a representative from La Colectiva of Delaware share some of the work that is being done with the Hispanic Immigrant population. One of the areas La Colectiva is concentrating on is research on the needs of those in the Hispanic Immigrant population. DVCC staff will consult with the group regarding its research findings.**

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COORDINATING COUNCIL

#### **1. 2016 Recommendation:**

The DVCC Legislative Committee should explore legislation to facilitate the temporary removal of firearms in alleged psychiatric emergencies.

#### **Response:**

The DVCC Legislative Committee will discuss the recommendations and possible legislation at the Committee's meeting in November of this year.

#### **2017 FIRT Report Update:**

The DVCC Legislative Committee did not meet in November 2016. The Committee will discuss the recommendation and possible legislation at the Legislative Committee meeting in May 2017.

#### **2018 FIRT Report Update:**

The DVCC Legislative Committee will continue to discuss the recommendation and possible legislation during the 2018 Legislative Session.

#### **2019 FIRT Report Update:**

**In June 2018, HB302 (the Beau Biden Gun Violence Prevention Act) and HB222 (The Lethal Violence Protection Order) were signed into law. HB302 would allow police to temporarily seize firearms from someone whom a mental health professional deems a danger to themselves or others. HB222, is a civil court order issued by a Justice of the Peace upon consideration of evidence provided by a family member or law enforcement officer that temporarily prohibits a person in crisis from possessing or purchasing firearms or ammunition.**

#### **2. 2016 Recommendation:**

The Fatal Incident Review Team should research national campaigns for the workplace to provide education on domestic violence and risk factors for lethality and report out to the Fatal Incident Review Team at the next meeting.

#### **Response:**

The DVCC staff is researching national campaigns for the workplace to provide education on domestic violence and risk factors for lethality. This research will be presented to the FIRT at an upcoming meeting with the Team.

#### **2017 FIRT Report Update:**

The DVCC staff has researched national campaigns for the workplace to provide education on domestic violence and risk factors for lethality. This research will be presented at an upcoming FIRT meeting in 2017.

#### **2018 FIRT Report Update:**

DVCC staff reached out to the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI) regarding best practices and research on this topic. Additional information will be presented to FIRT after consulting with the NDFVRI.

#### **2019 FIRT Report Update**

**DVCC staff will continue conversations with the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI) regarding best practices and research on this topic. Information will continue to be provided to FIRT.**

### 3. **2016 Recommendation:**

The DVCC shall continue to discuss the development of a Domestic Violence High Risk Team in Delaware to enable and enhance better communication and collaboration among stakeholders.

#### **Response:**

The DVCC has established a workgroup of stakeholders to explore the feasibility of developing a Domestic Violence High Risk Team in Delaware. The DVCC supports this effort to enhance communication and collaboration among stakeholders to help victims and survivors of domestic violence.

#### **2017 FIRT Report Update:**

The DVCC continues to meet with stakeholders to explore the creation of a Domestic Violence High Risk Team in Delaware. In March 2017, a Domestic Violence High Risk Team Ad Hoc Advisory Board was formed. This Advisory Board is tasked with examining memorandums of understanding, referral forms, and a means of tracking high risk domestic violence cases. The Ad Hoc Advisory Board will also research issues related to confidentiality for Domestic Violence High Risk Team members regarding information sharing across agencies as well as any possible statutory changes.

#### **2018 FIRT Report Update:**

The DVCC met with stakeholders to explore the creation of a Domestic Violence High Risk Team in Delaware. In March of 2017, a Domestic Violence High Risk Team Ad Hoc Advisory Board was created. This Ad Hoc Advisory Board examined a number of issues as it relates to the formation of a domestic violence high risk team. The Domestic Violence High Risk Team Ad Hoc Advisory Board concluded their work with a summary report and recommendations that have been presented to the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, which is currently pending approval.

#### **2019 FIRT Report Update:**

**The recommendations from the Domestic Violence High Risk Team Ad Hoc Advisory Board were approved by the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council. In addition, the DVCC was approved for Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding to contract a Domestic Violence High Risk Team Coordinator position. The DVCC anticipates this position being filled in the first quarter of 2019.**

### CLERK OF PEACE

#### **1. 2016 Recommendation:**

The Clerks of the Peace should provide domestic violence and blended family information and resources to marriage license applicants.

#### **Response:**

The Clerk of Peace offices in New Castle and Sussex county offices will have domestic violence and blended family information available, supplied by the DVCC, to applicants for marriage licenses.

#### **2017 Annual Report Update:**

Members of the Fatal Incident Review Team are continuing to develop information on domestic violence and blended families for the Clerk of the Peace. Once completed, DVCC staff will provide the information to New Castle County and Sussex County Clerk of the Peace offices for distribution for marriage license applicants.

#### **2018 Annual Report Update:**

The DVCC will provide the resources for the Clerks of the Peace, that include domestic violence information that is applicable to blended families as well as other marriage license applicants.

#### **2019 FIRT Report Update**

**DVCC staff will provide a draft of the resource information at an upcoming FIRT meeting. Upon approval of the resource, it will be provided to the Clerk of Peace offices for distribution to marriage license applicants.**

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**If you are in danger, please call 911**

## **Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis 24-Hour Hotline Numbers**

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### **New Castle County**

Domestic Violence	302-762-6110
Bi-Lingual	302-762-6110
Rape Crisis	1-800-773-8570
TTY	1-800-232-5460

### **Northern Kent County**

Domestic Violence	302-678-3886
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### **Kent & Sussex Counties**

Domestic Violence	302-422-8058
Rape Crisis	1-800-773-8570
Bi-lingual	302-745-9874

## **DVCC Main Office**

New Castle County Courthouse  
Suite 700  
500 N. King Street  
Wilmington, DE 19801

Phone: 302-255-0405  
Fax: 302-255-2236

<http://dvcc.delaware.gov>

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## **DVCC Kent & Sussex County Office**

Milford State Service Center  
Suite 105  
13 S. W. Front Street  
Milford, DE 19963

Phone: 302-424-7238  
Fax: 302-424-5311

<http://dvcc.delaware.gov>

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