

2021

FATAL INCIDENT REVIEW TEAM ANNUAL REPORT



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
COORDINATING COUNCIL

STATE OF DELAWARE

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The 2021 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 2020. This report is a supplement to the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Annual Report, which is published in the fall of each year.

In 2020, the Review Team consulted with the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI) to develop a plan to transition from in-person to virtual case reviews. DVCC staff, FIRT Co-Chairs, along with FIRT members participated in conversations with NDVFRI to discuss the transition. Additionally, participants were able to ask questions about what other fatality review teams were doing during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue the work of domestic violence case reviews when meeting in person was not an option. Team members discussed what they learned through consultation with NDVFRI and developed a plan to move forward with virtual case reviews in 2021.

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Fatal Incident Review Team



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 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.

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;
- A victim of domestic violence appointed by the Council; and,
- A licensed health-care professional knowledgeable in the screening and identification of domestic violence cases appointed by the Council.

Fatal Incident Review Team

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 the individual's own death or near-death, that individual's abusive partner or family member 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.

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Incidents of domestic violence related deaths	8	9	7	6	9
Victims of domestic violence homicide (excluding by legal intervention)	8	8	10	6	9
Homicides by legal intervention (responding law enforcement)	0	0	0	0	0
All domestic violence-related homicides	8	8	10	6	9
Perpetrator suicide (excluding by legal intervention)	2	4	5	2	4
Total deaths (victim and perpetrator)	10	12	15	8	13



Domestic Violence Related Deaths

The demographics of the 8 domestic violence homicide incidents in 2020 were as follows:

CAUSE OF DEATH:

- 6 - Firearm
- 1 - Strangulation & Blunt Force Trauma
- 1 - Blunt force Trauma

VICTIM RELATIONSHIP TO OFFENDER:

- 1 - Girlfriend
- 2 - Ex- Girlfriend
- 2 - Wife
- 3 - Other*

Victim

Race

Black - 5
White - 3

Gender

Male - 3
Female - 5

Age

1 to 18 - 1
19 to 25 - 1
26 to 35 - 2
36 to 45 - 3
46 to 55 - 1

Perpetrator

Race

Black - 6
White - 3

Gender

Male - 7
Female - 2

Age

1 to 18 - 2
19 to 25 - 3
36 to 45 - 1
46 to 55 - 3

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

*Other can be defined as a bystander or a family member of a domestic violence victim.

Domestic Violence Related Deaths



This portion of the report is a collection of data from 140 domestic violence fatal incident reviews conducted by FIRT between 1996 and 2020. These reviews included cases where prosecution was completed by the Department of Justice 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 140 fatal incident reviews, there were 175 domestic violence-related deaths and 3 near deaths.

Domestic Violence-Related Deaths and Near-Deaths

Homicide Victims	121
Perpetrator Suicides Following Homicides	30
Suicide Only	23
Undetermined Victim Deaths	1
Near-Deaths	3



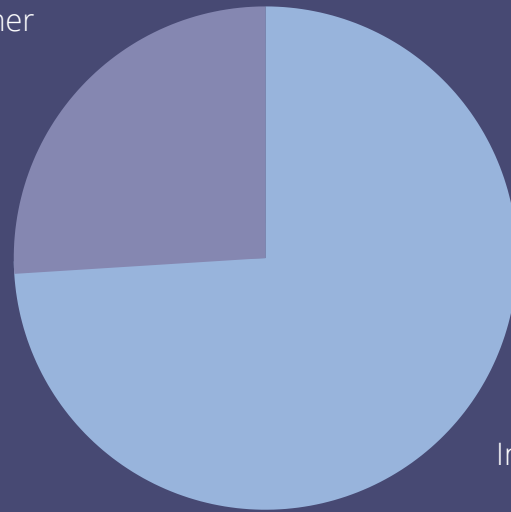
Domestic Violence Related Deaths



Of the 140 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.

Homicide Victims 1996-2020

Non-Intimate Partner
26%



Intimate Partner
74%

Suicide Only
44%



Suicide Deaths 1996-2020

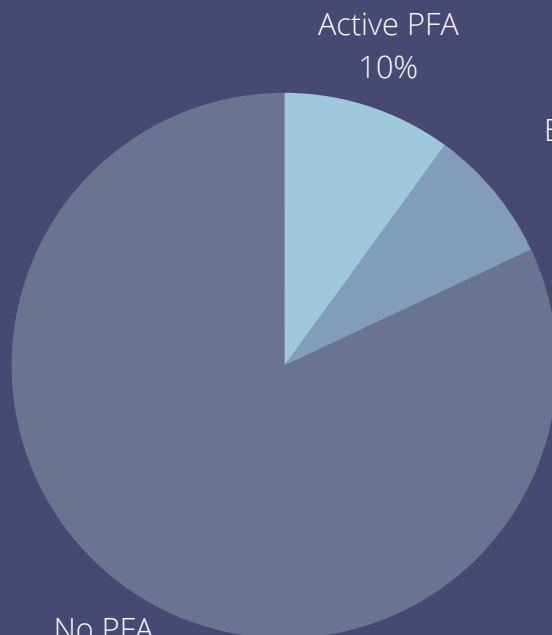
Perpetrator Suicide Following Homicide
56%

Victims with Protection from Abuse Orders

Active PFA
10%

Expired PFA
8%

No PFA
82%

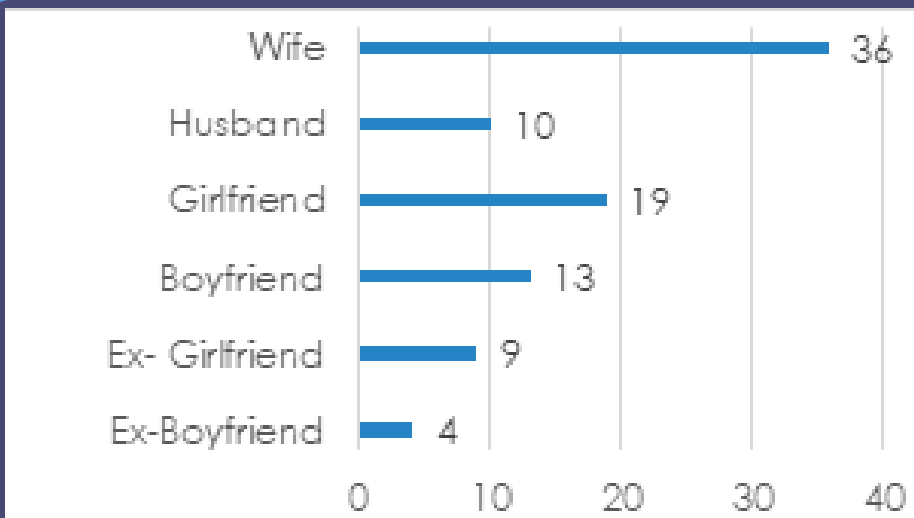


Intimate Partner Data



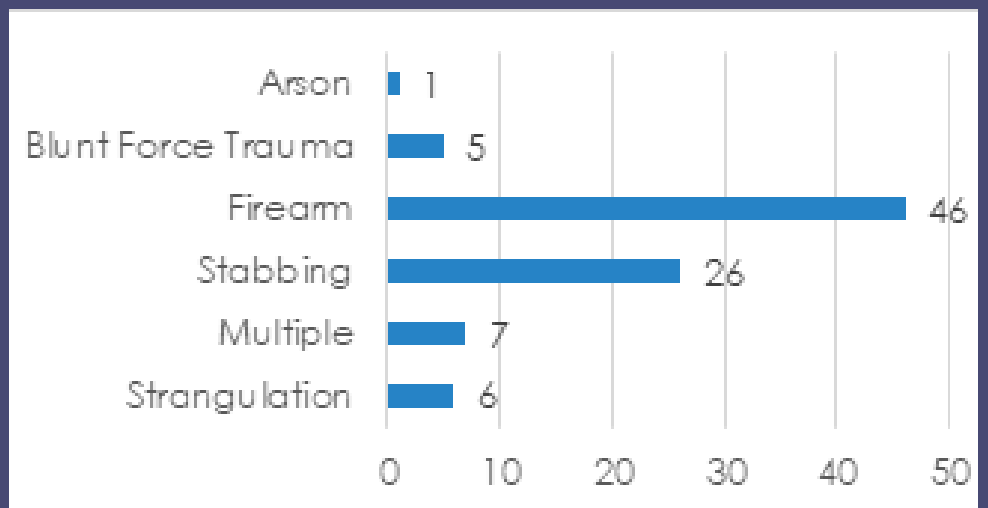
Of the 121 homicide victims and 3 near-death victims reviewed by FIRT, 91 victims or 73% of the homicides occurred in a past or present intimate partner relationship. The term “intimate partner” includes current and former spouses, current and former dating couples with or without a child in common, and teen dating couples. Intimate partners may be of the same gender.

Out of 88 intimate partner homicides or near-deaths, 49% of the homicides occurred when a victim attempted to leave or had ended a relationship with the perpetrator.



Victim Relationship to Offender

Victim Cause of Death



Intimate Partner Data

Victims and Perpetrators by Gender

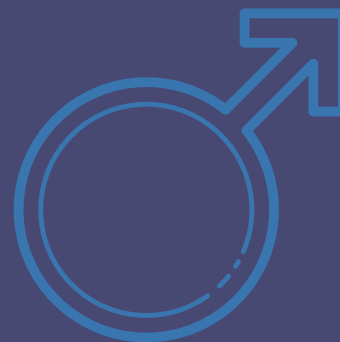


Female Victims
69 (75%)

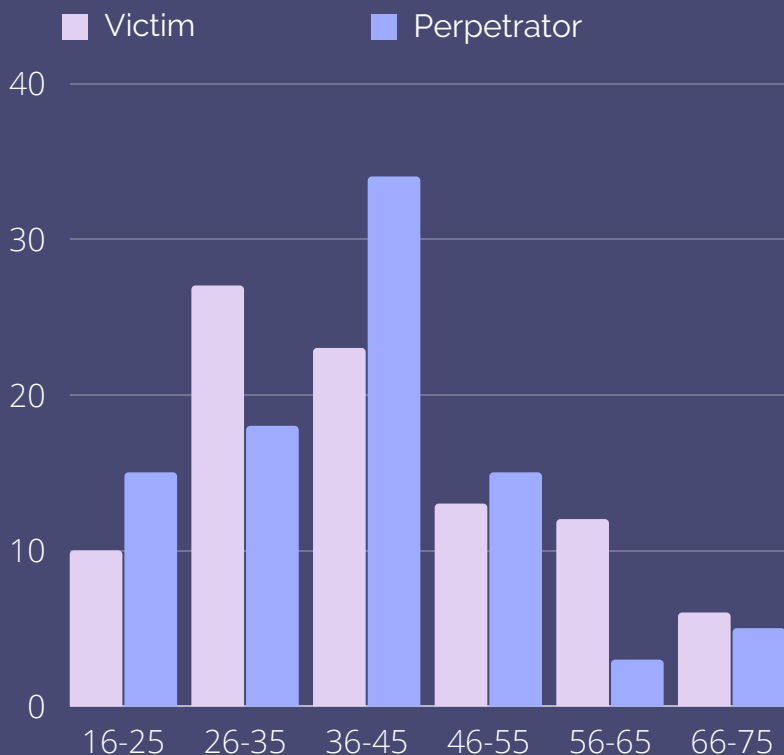
Male Victims
22 (25%)

Female Perpetrators
23 (25%)

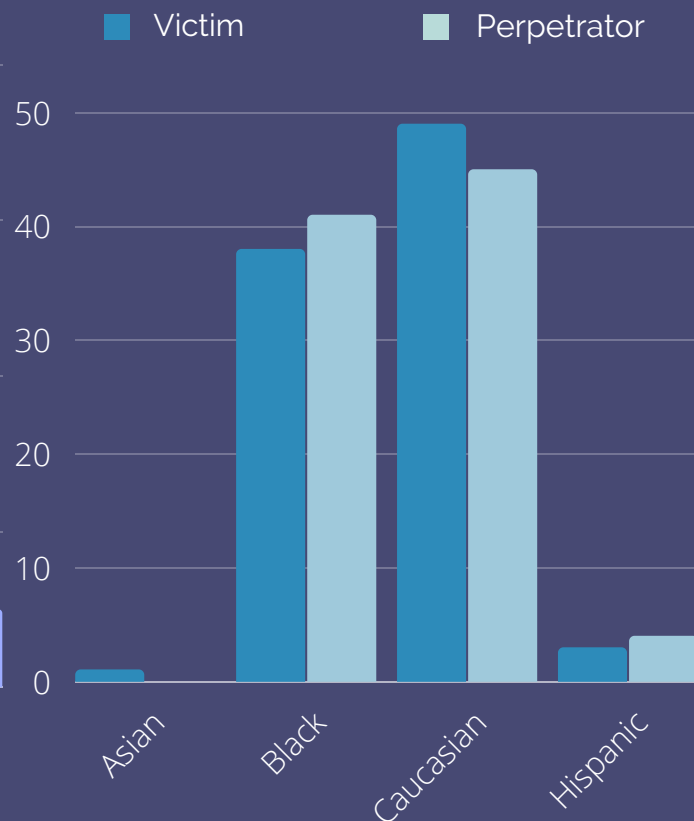
Male Perpetrators
67 (75%)



Victim and Perpetrator Age at Time of Incident



Victim and Perpetrator by Race



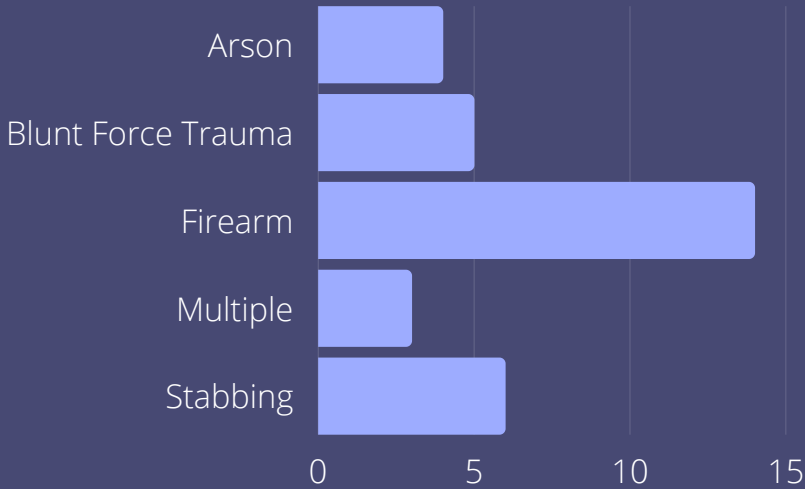
Non-Intimate Partner Data



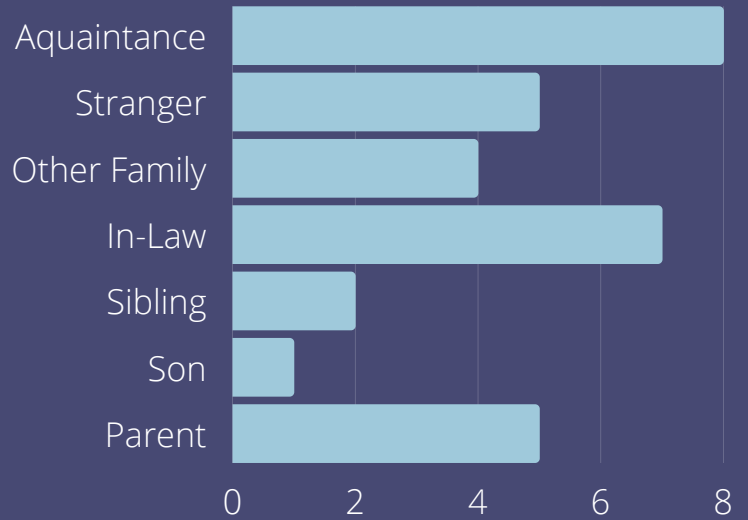
Domestic violence-related deaths between non-intimate partners include individuals with a familial relationship such as parent/child or sibling relationship.

Of the 121 homicide victims included in this report, 32 victims were “non-intimate partners.” Also included in these homicide numbers are victims who were bystanders (acquaintances or strangers).

Victim Cause of Death



Victim Relationship to Perpetrator



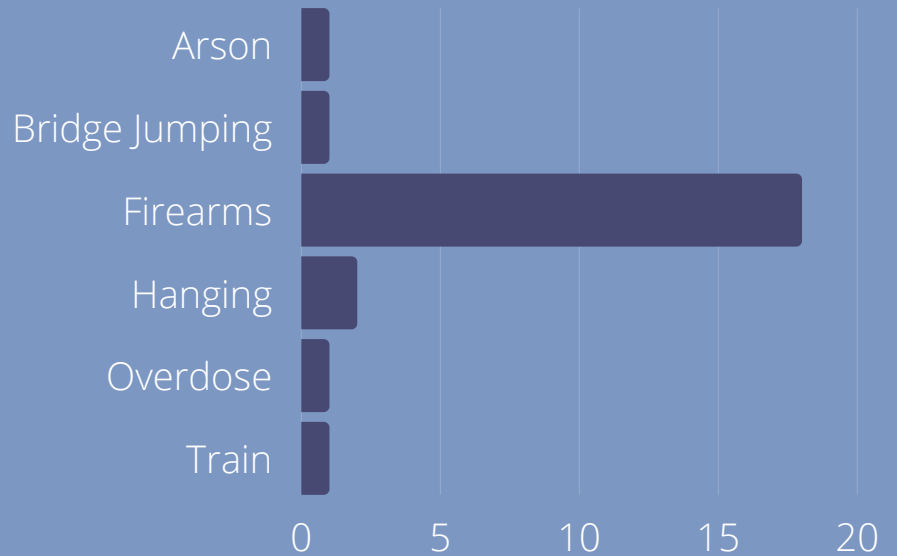
Suicide Data



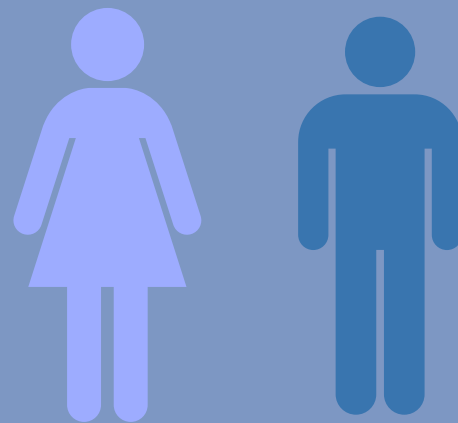
Of the 175 domestic violence-related deaths included in this report, there were 30 perpetrator suicides following a homicide or murder/suicide. Out of the 30 murder/suicide cases reviewed, 28 of the perpetrators were male and 2 were female.

"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 was 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.

Cause of Death Suicide Only



Murder/Suicide Perpetrators



6% of Females

94% of Males

FIRT Follow Ups, Recommendations & Responses



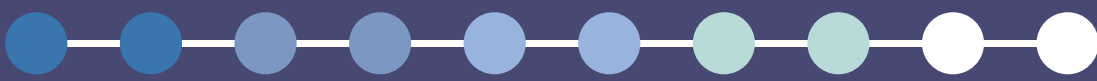
The ultimate purpose for reviewing domestic violence fatalities is to reduce the incidence of such deaths. At the end of each case review and following the presentation of information, Review Team members are asked if they have any recommendations for improving the system response to domestic violence.

Prior year FIRT recommendations are listed in the report with 2021 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 and 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.



2020 Responses and Recommendations



2020 Recommendation Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

1. The DVCC shall research potential links between substance abuse and domestic violence; particularly, potential resources available for middle school aged children and their parents regarding substance abuse prevention and treatment.

Response:

The DVCC staff will present the recommendation to the Council at the March 2020 Quarterly Meeting.

2021 Update:
DVCC staff presented the recommendation to the Council at the March 2020 Quarterly Meeting. DVCC staff is currently reviewing potential links between substance abuse and domestic violence.



2020 Responses and Recommendations



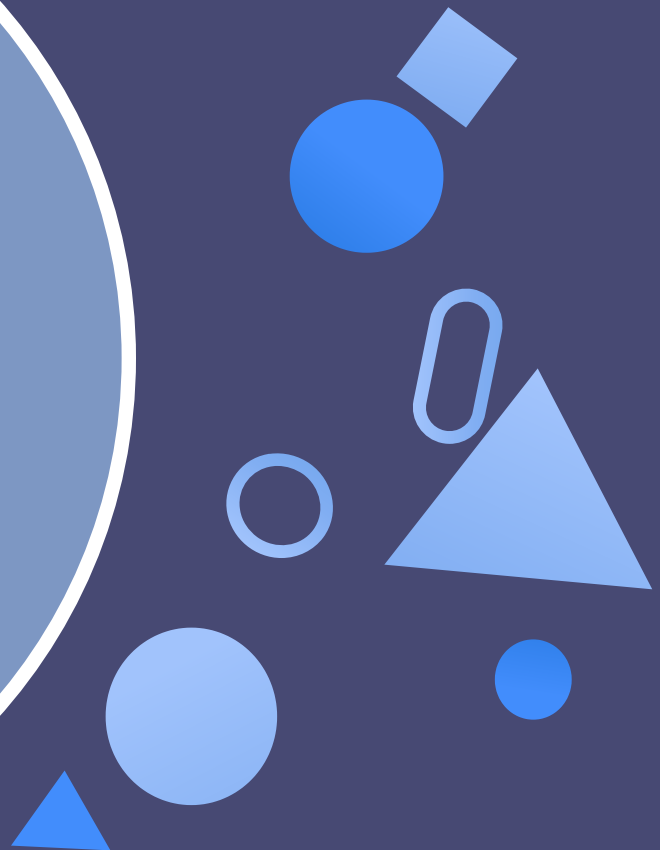
2. The DVCC will send a letter to Superior Court, Family Court, Court of Common Pleas, Justice of the Peace Court, the Office of Defense Services and the Department of Justice, citing statistics of domestic violence offenses including offenses with deadly weapons and will detail the importance of identifying such offenses as it relates to recommending the DVCC certified treatment programs in domestic violence cases.

Response:

The DVCC staff will present the recommendation to the Council at the March 2020 Quarterly Meeting.

2021 Update:

DVCC staff is drafting a letter to be sent to Superior Court, Family Court, Court of Common Pleas and Justice of the Peace Court, the Office of Defense Services and the Department of Justice citing statistics of domestic violence offenses including offenses with deadly weapons and detailing the importance of identifying such offenses as it relates to recommending the DVCC certified treatment programs in domestic violence cases.



2016 Recommendation Follow Ups



THE CLERK OF THE PEACE

1. 2016 Recommendation:

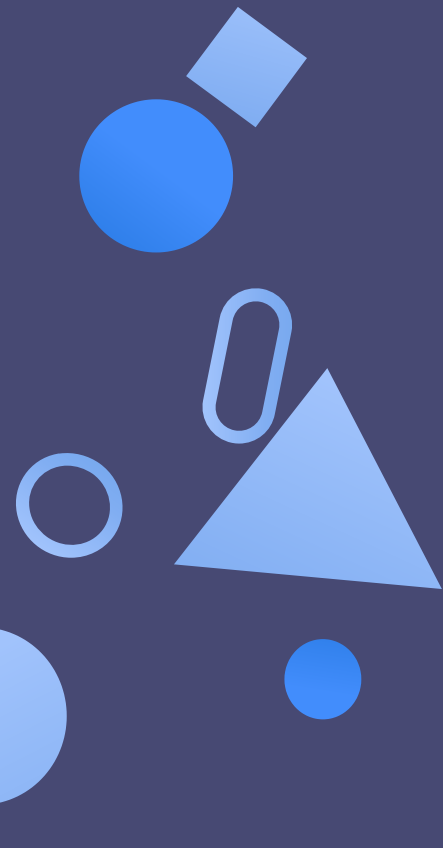
The Clerks of Peace should provide domestic violence and blended family information and resources to marriage license applicants.

Response:

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

2021 FIRT Report Update:

Members of the Fatal Incident Review Team are finalizing the resource information to be provided to the Clerk of Peace office.



IF YOU ARE IN DANGER, PLEASE CALL 911

Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis

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

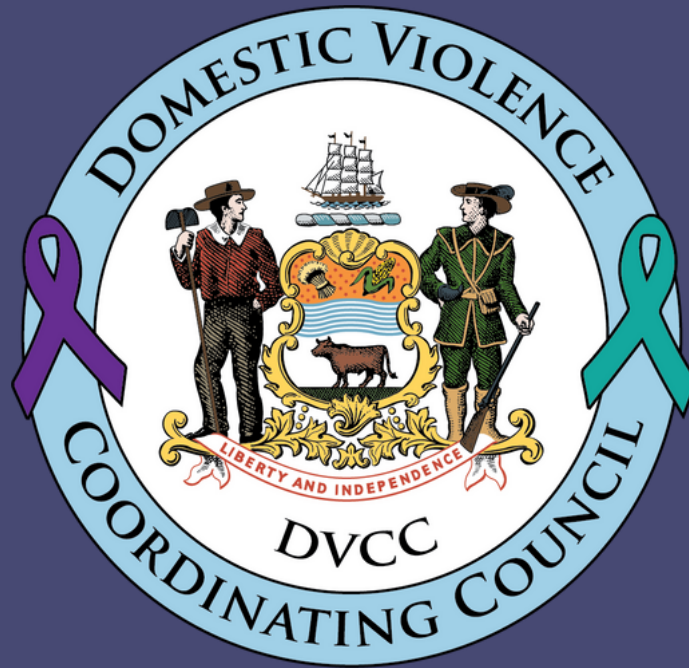
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Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
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