

# 2023

## FATAL INCIDENT REVIEW TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

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**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
COORDINATING COUNCIL**

State of Delaware

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The 2023 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 2022. This report is a supplement to the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council’s Annual Report, which is published in the fall of each year. Building off the success of holding virtual reviews in the 2020 and 2021 calendar years, the Review Team continued to hold all reviews from a virtual posture in 2022.

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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.

# FATAL INCIDENT REVIEW TEAM



## FIRT CO-CHAIRS

The Honorable Jan R. Jurden  
Professor Dana Harrington Conner  
Debra Reed

## 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.



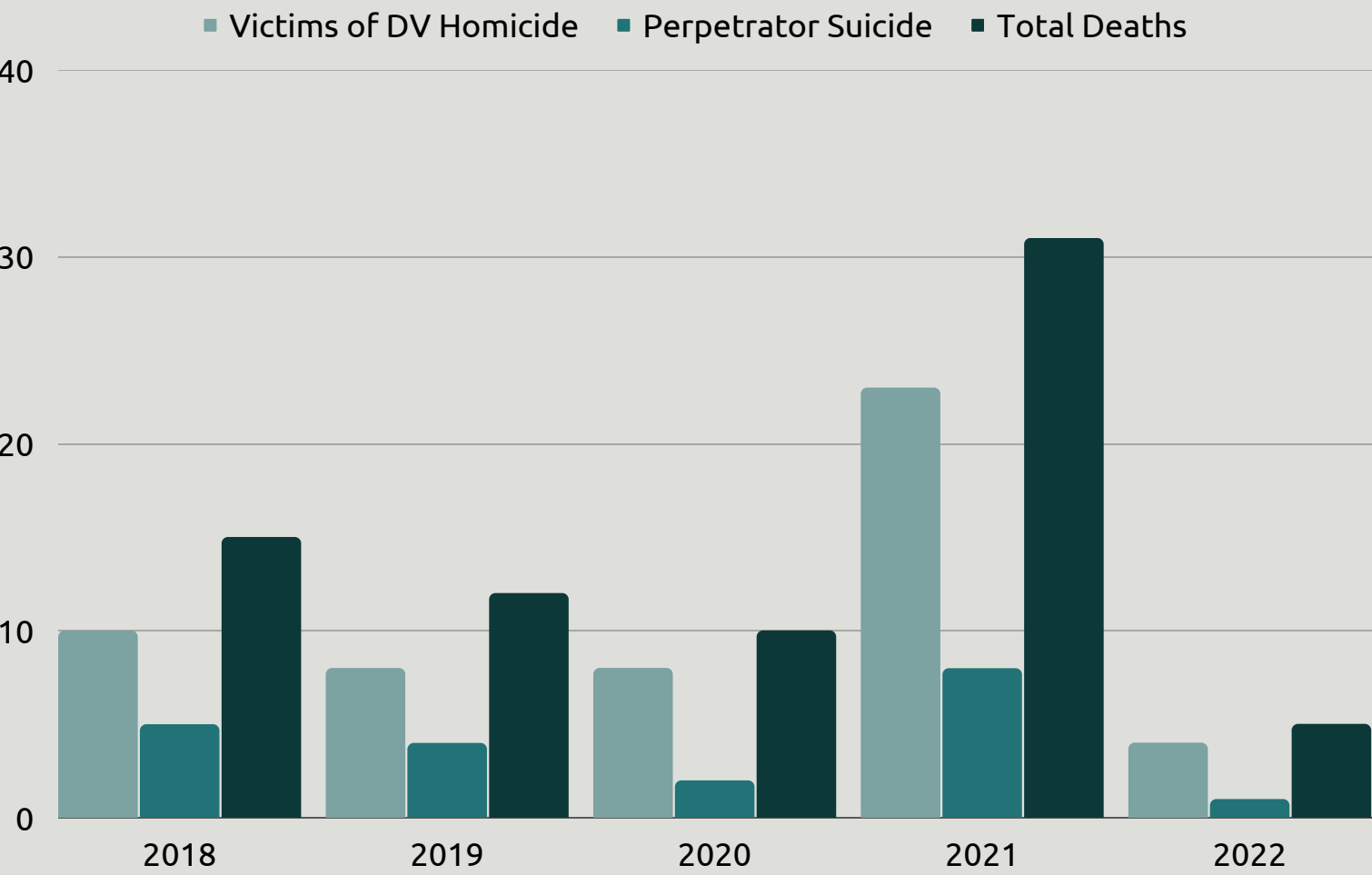
The Review Team may also invite the participation of individuals with particular expertise that would be helpful to the review panel, or representatives from organizations or agencies that had contact with or provided services to the individual prior to the individual's own death or near-death, that 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 bystanders if the death was a result of domestic violence, either intimate partner violence or between family members. It also includes instances of suicide related to domestic violence.

In 2022, there were four victims of domestic violence homicide and one perpetrator suicide. There was also one domestic violence related suicide.\*



\*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 history of abuse by or toward their partner.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED DEATHS

## Victim & Perpetrator Demographics



The demographics of the 4 domestic violence homicide incidents in 2022\* were as follows:

### VICTIM

#### RACE

BLACK - 1  
WHITE - 3

#### GENDER

MALE - 2  
FEMALE - 2

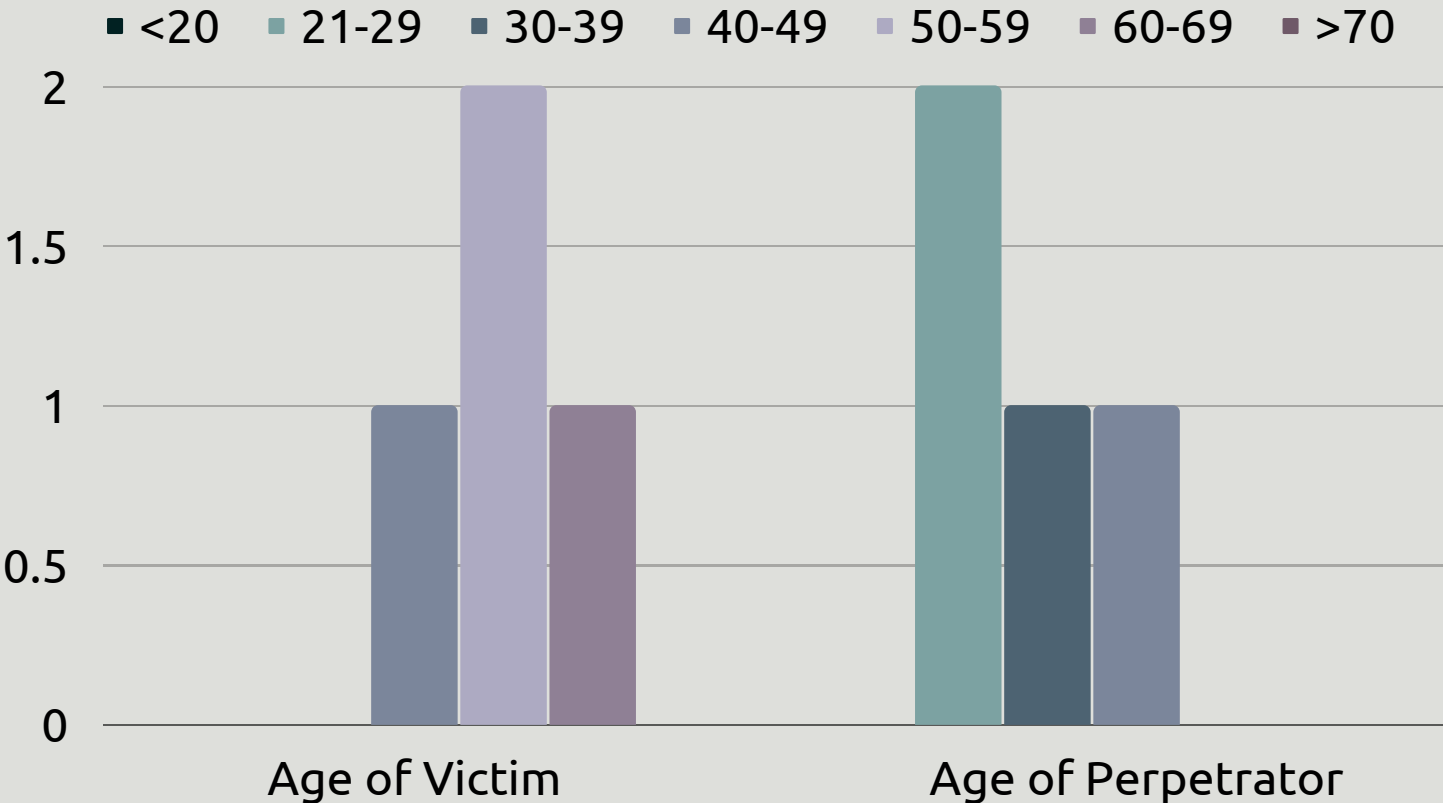
### PERPETRATOR

#### RACE

BLACK - 1  
WHITE - 3

#### GENDER

MALE - 4  
FEMALE - 0



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

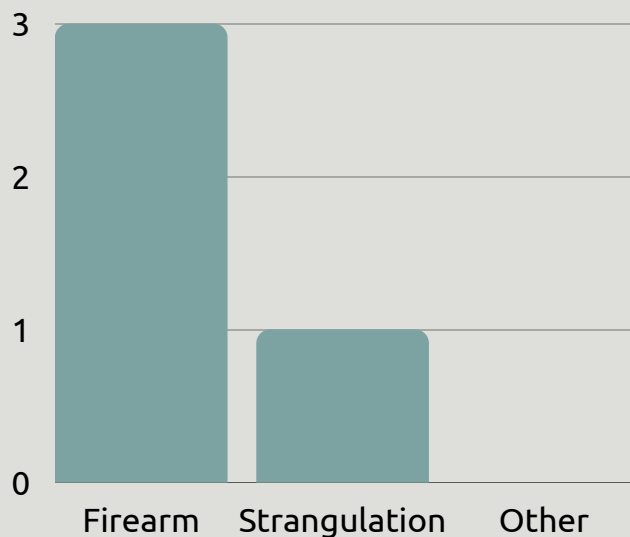
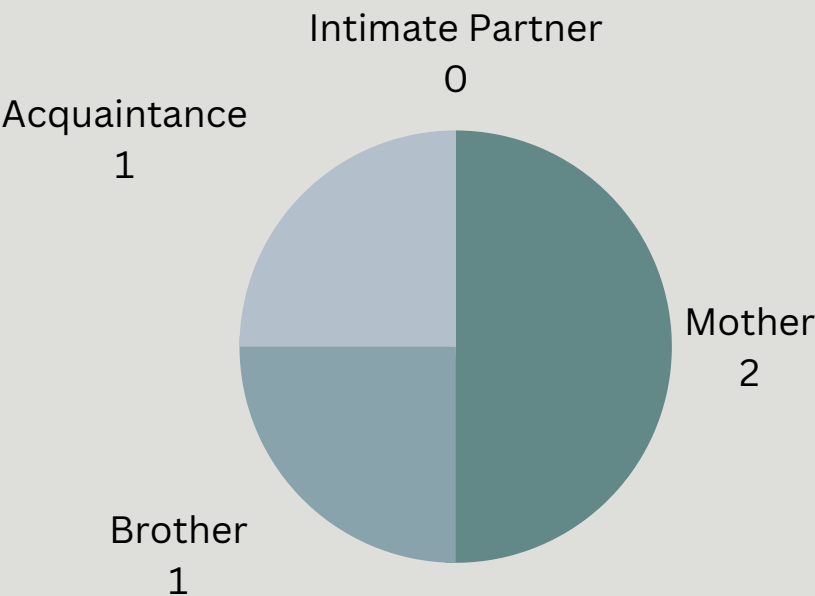
# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED DEATHS

## Victim & Perpetrator Demographics



The demographics of the 4 domestic violence homicide incidents in 2022\* were as follows:

This year, none of the domestic violence homicide incidents were between intimate partners. There were 2 incidents involving a son who killed his mother, 1 brother who killed his brother, and 1 acquaintance who was killed trying to intervene in a domestic violence situation between the perpetrator and his partner.



Firearms continue to be the leading cause of death in domestic violence related homicides. This year, 3 of the 4 homicide incidents involved firearms.

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



# MEETING WITH DR. WEBSDALE



In 2022, FIRT members had the opportunity to meet with the esteemed Dr. Neil Websdale. Dr. Websdale is the Director of the Family Violence Institute at Northern Arizona University Flagstaff. His social policy work involves helping to establish networks of domestic violence fatality review teams across the United States and elsewhere.



Dr. Websdale and FIRT members discussed the history of FIRT in Delaware along with his work with the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI).

He also spoke with the team about conducting quality reviews, the value of building bridges with other review teams like the Child Death review team, and making recommendations that are efficacious and able to be implemented.

The opportunity to learn from Dr. Websdale's expertise prepared Delaware's FIRT to conduct reviews that are more comprehensive and impactful than ever before.

# FIRT 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 Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC) 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.



# 2022 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES



## Department of Justice



### **FIRT RECOMMENDATION:**

Department of Justice (DOJ) and DVCC will coordinate to provide law enforcement with training on the dynamics of stalking and charges related to stalking behavior.

### **RESPONSE:**

"The Department of Justice has recently provided training on this subject to the New Castle County Police Department and has previously provided similar trainings to other law enforcement agencies. We look forward to coordinating with the DVCC to provide training on stalking dynamics and charging to law enforcement agencies throughout the State."

-AG Kathy Jennings

# 2022 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES



## Domestic Violence Coordinating Council



### **FIRT RECOMMENDATION:**

The DVCC shall explore and discuss collateral consequences of a potential change in legislation expanding the use of DVCC-certified evaluation and treatment for IPV respondents in Protection from Abuse orders.

DVCC shall explore and discuss collateral consequences of a potential change in legislation that will address domestic violence misdemeanor cases that are not within Family Court's exclusive jurisdiction.

DVCC will work to provide centralized resources to the Delaware Bar to provide attorneys with the most up-to-date information regarding certified treatment providers.

DOJ and DVCC will coordinate to provide law enforcement with training on the dynamics of stalking and charges related to stalking behavior.

# 2022 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES



## Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

### RESPONSE:

The DVCC's Treatment Committee will discuss the collateral consequences of expanding the use of DVCC-certified evaluations and treatment in PFA cases.

The DVCC's Criminal Justice Committee will explore and discuss the collateral consequences of legislation that addresses domestic violence misdemeanor cases that are not within Family Court's exclusive jurisdiction.

The DVCC's Treatment Committee will explore the best way to share up-to-date information regarding certified treatment providers with members of the Delaware bar.

The DVCC's Training Committee will be tasked with coordinating with DOJ on training for law enforcement on the dynamics of stalking and charges related to stalking behavior.



# WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023



Due to staffing changes, the Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT) was only able to review one case in 2022 over two sessions. In 2023, the team plans to hold at least three full day intensive reviews. Continuing to offer virtual reviews ensures that meetings are as accessible as possible to team members across the state and enables high participation in reviews.



FIRT and DVCC staff continue to track domestic violence related deaths in Delaware and provide relevant statistics. FIRT also plans to expand data tracking and gather additional information to analyze trends in domestic violence related deaths and near-deaths.

In 2023, DVCC staff plan to implement a more streamlined and efficient case referral and tracking database for FIRT cases.



## IF YOU ARE IN DANGER, PLEASE CALL 911

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### 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

#### Kent & Sussex Counties:

Domestic Violence 302 422-8058

Rape Crisis 1-800-773-8570

Bi-lingual 302 745-9874

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### DVCC Main Office

900 North King Street, Suite 300

Wilmington, DE 19801

Phone: 302 255-1700

### DVCC Kent and Sussex County Office

Milford State Service Center

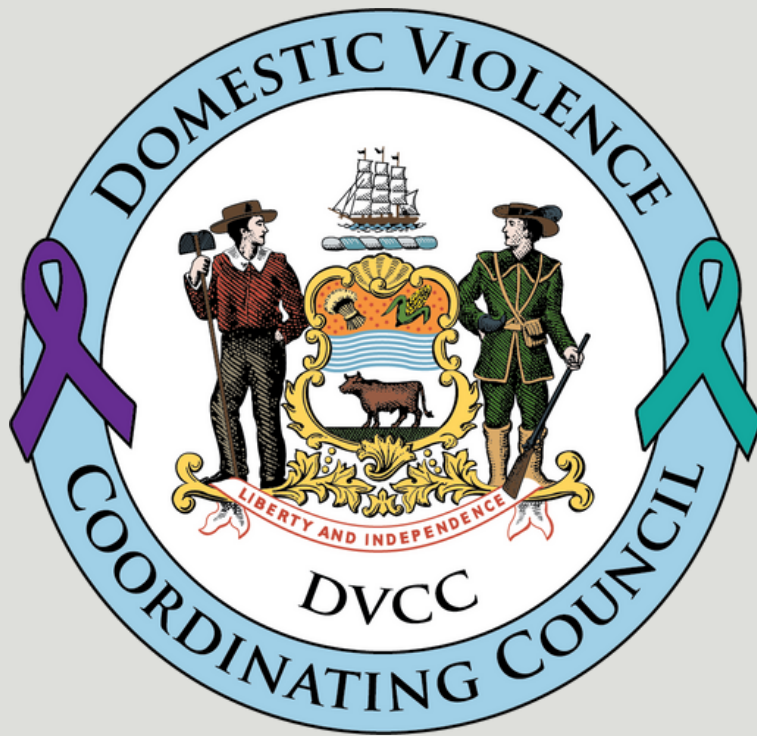
13 S.W. Front Street, Suite 105

Milford, DE 19963

Phone: 302 424-7238

Fax: 302 424-5311

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