

# The Supreme Court of Ohio

## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Chief Justice Sharon L. Kennedy  
Robert W. Horner, III, Administrative Director

**CC:** Gina White Palmer, Deputy Administrative Director  
Stephanie Nelson, Court Services Division Director

**FROM:** Judge James W. Brown, Chair, Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence  
Anne M. Murray, Policy Counsel

**DATE:** April 10, 2025

**RE:** Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence – 2024 Annual Report

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Pursuant to Guideline 4.03 of the Operating Guidelines for the Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence (Advisory Committee), we are proud to present the Advisory Committee's 2024 Annual Report.

### **Purpose of Advisory Committee**

The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to provide ongoing advice to the Supreme Court of Ohio and its staff to improve Ohio courts' response to domestic violence and related issues. Given the far-reaching impact of domestic violence on victims, perpetrators, their families, and communities, the advice spans more than merely criminal or civil protection order matters and includes every type of court. The group recommends workable rules and standards; fosters effectiveness through the multidisciplinary approach; and assists the development and delivery of education for justice partners on issues the Advisory Committee deems necessary to assist them to best address this significant topic.

### **2024 Activities and Accomplishments**

In 2024, the Advisory Committee met on February 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Thomas J. Moyer Ohio Judicial Center, and via remote conferencing platform on June 21<sup>st</sup> and September 13<sup>th</sup>, under the leadership of Judge James W. Brown of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Domestic Relations Division and Juvenile Branch. At each meeting, the Advisory Committee heard a brief presentation on a different topic to enrich discussion regarding possible areas of focus for upcoming projects. Presentations included a documentary about Mark Wynn, a former police officer and national expert on domestic and sexual violence response; and presentations on the signs and symptoms of trauma and secondary trauma, and the barriers faced by some foreign-born

survivors when accessing court services. As discussed below, the Advisory Committee's work focused on outreach and education regarding domestic violence response, strangulation, and protection orders; increasing access to courts; providing input on policy matters; and, supporting promising practices regarding domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

### **Outreach and Education**

The Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence serves as the Collaboration Board for the Supreme Court's Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grants. In that role, the group guides and oversees the management of the VAWA funds by the Court's Domestic Violence Program.

The last several years, Advisory Committee members have discussed concerns for the high turnover of workforce in all justice partner agencies, making ongoing education and bolstering local coordinated community response a priority. Attendees of all Domestic Violence Program sponsored education courses in 2023 were asked what topics they would most like in the future. Domestic violence dynamics and working with victims; strangulation and the Ohio law; and the Ohio protection orders and related forms, were among the most frequently requested subjects. A primary focus of the Advisory Committee VAWA funds in 2024 was outreach and education for Ohio courts and their justice partners about these topics.

#### *Regional Domestic Violence Education*

A main focus of the Advisory Committee and the Domestic Violence Program this year was a project to bring domestic violence training to Ohio justice partners in their home areas. In 2024, the Advisory Committee oversaw a series of day-long, in-person, regional courses, taught by national expert retired Nashville Police Lieutenant Mark Wynn. Advisory Committee members were instrumental in convening and leading the planning teams for their respective regions' courses.

Courses were held in Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Meigs, and Montgomery counties. Through this project, 595 justice partners learned about the dynamics of domestic violence; the lethality risk for victims and law enforcement; the importance of and how to assess the primary physical aggressor; the responses to trauma and impact on memory; trauma-informed interviewing techniques; strangulation and brain injury; witness intimidation; and the effect of domestic violence on children.

#### *Strangulation Law Education*

Recognizing that Ohio's felony strangulation law is relatively new, and justice partners continue to struggle with a potentially lethal act that can leave no visible injuries, the Advisory Committee also focused on strangulation education this year by sponsoring seven courses, reaching 830 attendees, and developing education materials.

Strangulation was a topic at each regional course. Mark Wynn presented on the physiology; signs and symptoms; and short- and long-term effects of strangulation; and Advisory Committee member Alexandria Ruden discussed Ohio's strangulation statute and emerging case law.

In October, the Domestic Violence Program and Judicial College hosted a webinar featuring an intimate partner strangulation case study of an incident captured by home video. Ninety-eight percent of the 235 attendees said they were likely to use the information they learned.

Finally, the Advisory Committee's Strangulation and Traumatic Brain Injury Workgroup continued to develop resources for courts about topic, including the law, the signs and symptoms, lethality and risk, emerging research, and how resulting brain injury might affect one's ability to access court systems. The Advisory Committee expects the resources to be submitted to the justices for review in 2025.

### **Access to Courts**

#### *Ohio Legal Help Civil Stalking Protection Order Project*

Since 2021, the Advisory Committee has partnered with Ohio Legal Help (OLH), an online self-help legal assistance website, using the Court's Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grant funds to enhance the availability of easy to use, online resources and information about protection orders for Ohioans. The first project placed the standard protection order forms on the OLH website, [www.ohiolegalhelp.org](http://www.ohiolegalhelp.org), allowing users to easily find and complete the forms online, using a mobile phone, tablet, or computer, and to stop and save the information, and return as needed, find legal and advocacy services in the user's county, educational materials about the court process and location, and a guided interview for Domestic Violence and Dating Violence Protection Order petitions. In 2022, the Advisory Committee approved using grant funds to translate the protection order information into Spanish, the most requested language for interpreters in Ohio courts.

The Advisory Committee partnered with OLH again in 2023, to create a guided interview for the Civil Stalking and Sexually Oriented Offender Protection Order petitions, like the guided interview previously created for Domestic Violence and Dating Violence Civil Protection Order petitions. Advisory Committee members who regularly work with these types of protection orders assisted with the development. The tool launched in June of 2024.

Ohio Legal Help reports that the pages are highly successful. Since the protection order page launched, it has consistently been the most visited family law topic on the website. In 2024, more than 57,000 users utilized the Protection Order Module. This tool provided critical assistance to thousands of individuals, with over 34,000 accessing the [Protection Order overview page](#), nearly 7,500 visiting the [Domestic Violence/Dating Violence Civil Protection Order \(CPO\) page](#), and close to 6,700 exploring the [Stalking and Sexually Oriented Offense CPO page](#). Additionally, nearly 700 Ohioans used the Protection Order Guided Interviews to work on their CPO forms. This module continues to be a vital resource for Ohioans seeking safety and justice.

### *Protection Order Education*

Advisory Committee members continued to conduct education in their respective counties and field questions throughout the year about the different Ohio protection orders and forms. In October 2024, Domestic Violence Program staff and an Advisory Committee member partnered with the Judicial College to present the webinar *Understanding Protection Orders* presented to 306 justice partners. Topics included the different kinds of orders (civil and criminal), the relationships and acts required to be eligible, which courts handle which types, and how orders are enforced.

### *Translation of Marsy's Law Form into Seven Languages*

In April 2023, the Supreme Court created the Crime Victim Restitution Amount Summary Form to help crime victims document their economic harm for restitution requests, according to their constitutional and statutory rights collectively known as “Marsy’s Law”. The Advisory Committee reviewed and informed the development.

To increase access for Limited English Proficient crime victims, this year the Advisory Committee worked with the Language Services Section and approved and oversaw a grant-funded project to translate the Crime Victim Restitution Amount Summary Form into the seven most requested languages for court interpreters: Arabic, Chinese, French, Nepali, Russian, Somali, and Spanish. The translated forms may be found on the [Supreme Court's Marsy's Law and Crime Victim Rights page](#) with the English version.

### **Input on Policy**

#### *Legislation*

The Advisory Committee closely monitored multiple bills addressing issues relating to domestic violence that, if passed, could require revisions to existing or recommended forms, rules, or practices. The topics were wide-ranging: increasing the penalty for felony domestic violence charges; prohibiting installing tracking devices or apps without consent; altering the factors for analysis for parental rights and responsibilities; removal of the spousal rape exception; and requiring law enforcement to conduct a lethality assessment when responding to a domestic violence call.

#### *Case Management Time Standards*

Members of the Advisory Committee offered input on recommended time standards for cases related to domestic violence.

## *Violence Against Women Act Advisory Board*

In addition to the projects mentioned above, the Advisory Committee oversaw several Violence Against Women Act grant funded projects intended to enhance and improve response to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence in the justice system.

### *Domestic Violence Education*

- *Cultural Responsiveness, DV, and the Court Webinar Series*: 137 justice partners attendees. Topics included the breadth and unique qualities of the Appalachian region, barriers to help seeking, and strategies for engaging the community to improve response within the region.
- *Recognizing and Managing Trauma Webinar*: 100 attendees. Topics included the short- and long-term effects of trauma; how trauma could interfere with access to the court system; how to identify trauma; and steps to mitigate the effects.
- *Post-Separation Lethality for Victims and Children*: 163 justice partner attendees. Topics included risks of lethality and how risk assessment and coordination of service among justice partners is essential to victim and child safety.
- *Domestic Violence Effects on Children*: 153 court partner attendees. Topics included the effect of toxic stress of domestic violence and how it affects children's brains; the prevalence of child maltreatment when domestic violence is present; that post-separation abuse and resulting barriers to healthcare can affect children; how legal system involvement can complicate health issues for children, as well as how courts can promote protective factors for health and resiliency.

### *Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court Victim Survey Translation Project*

In 2023 and 2024, the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court conducted outreach through a survey to survivors of domestic violence who have been part of a custody or parenting plan case in their court to develop a curriculum to improve parenting skills for parents who have used violence against the other parent in the past and who will likely get visitation with their child as part of a court order or agreement. The Advisory Committee approved the court's request to use grant funds to translate the survey for and responses of victims who spoke Spanish and Arabic, the most common foreign languages in their county. The project completed in 2024.

## **2025 Anticipated Projects**

In 2025, the Advisory Committee will continue to assess progress on identified goals and objectives and pursue activities consistent with its mission. The Advisory Committee anticipates working on the following projects:

### *Domestic Violence, Strangulation, and Protection Order Education*

Attendees of education courses in 2024 were asked what future education they would like the Domestic Violence Program to offer. The Advisory Committee will continue to oversee trainings on the most common topics requested, which again included domestic violence dynamics and working with victims, strangulation and the law, and Ohio protection orders and related forms.

### *Trauma and Resilience*

Recognizing that traumatic events may produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, cognition, and memory, and that the data suggests that all Ohio judges, magistrates, and their staff are routinely serving individuals who have experienced significant trauma, the Advisory Committee and Domestic Violence Program using VAWA funds to conduct trainings for judicial officers on the neurobiology of trauma; trauma-informed questioning; and the science of hope and resilience for survivors and offenders.

### *Interpreters and Deaf Survivors*

The Advisory Committee has become aware of a gap in availability of qualified American Sign Language interpreters in the state, creating challenges for courts trying to obtain interpreters, and the need for deaf survivors and the attorneys who serve them to become more aware of the resources they are entitled to when accessing the legal system. The Advisory Committee plans to work with the Language Services Section and the two statewide domestic violence service providers for deaf individuals to plan regional courses for justice partners and the deaf community on the rules, laws, and practical expectations regarding securing interpreters for deaf clients; and to create informational materials with the rules and laws regarding the need to secure appropriate interpreters for deaf individuals who engage with courts using VAWA funds.

### *Continued Cultural Responsiveness and the Courts Education*

Attendees of this year's courses also requested more education on cultural responsiveness for victims from different communities. The Advisory Committee will continue to plan Cultural Responsiveness, DV and the Courts courses for court personnel.

### *Technical Assistance*

As the Collaboration Board overseeing the Court's VAWA grants activities, the Advisory Committee will continue to provide leadership and direction on VAWA funded activities to maximize capacity and project impact.

As always, the dedicated members of the Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence will continue to strive to provide valuable service to the Ohio courts and the Supreme Court of Ohio.