

# The Supreme Court of Ohio

## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Chief Justice Sharon L. Kennedy

**CC:** Robert W. Horner, III, Administrative Director  
Gina White Palmer, Deputy Administrative Director, Legal Services  
Stephanie Graubner Nelson, Director, Office of Court Services

**FROM:** Judge James W. Brown, Chair, Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence  
Kyana Pierson, Deputy Director, Office of Court Services

**DATE:** January 20, 2026

**RE:** 2025 Annual Report on the Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence

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Pursuant to Guideline 4.03 of the Operating Guidelines for the Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence (“Advisory Committee”), we present here the Advisory Committee’s 2025 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.

### **2025 Activities and Accomplishments**

In 2025, the Advisory Committee met on February 14, June 6, September 19, and December 19 via remote conferencing under the leadership of Judge James W. Brown of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, Domestic Relations and Juvenile Division. 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 an overview of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network’s annual Ohio Domestic Violence Fatality Summary for 2024; an update on the development of the Stark County Family Justice Center; and a summary of rules regarding securing interpreters for court hearings, the differences in qualification of interpreter levels, and best practices for securing the most qualified interpreters for

court services by Language Services Manager Bruno Romero; discussion of batterer intervention programs; and a summary of the promising practices resulting from improved coordination regarding domestic violence response in Franklin County among court and justice partners.

As discussed below, the Advisory Committee's work focused on regrouping during grant funding uncertainty; 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 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.

This year the Advisory Committee members continued to discuss the importance of outreach and education opportunities for justice partners to address ongoing workforce turnover and potential loss of agency knowledge to bolster effective response to domestic violence.

### *Online Course Development*

Interruptions in federal grant funding in the first half of the year resulted in anticipated grant funded education projects not being completed. To address the need in the meantime, the Advisory Committee, with the Domestic Violence Program, pivoted from hosting live and regional in person grant funded education to partner with the Judicial College to create a series of online courses for courts and justice partners. The following online courses were published:

- *Misuse of Technology in Domestic Violence & Stalking:* Offenders can misuse technologies and online spaces as tactics of domestic violence and stalking. In this course, faculty review common types and misuses of technology to commit actions within the major stalking categories of surveillance, life invasion, intimidation, and interference.
- *The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Children & Families:* In contested custody cases and high conflict divorces, it is not uncommon to have allegations of Intimate Partner Violence ("IPV"). Faculty in this module summarize the data regarding IPV in custody cases and the impact it can have on the family and the child. They describe the use of screening instruments and common recommendations made in cases where IPV is suspected.
- *The Many Faces of Intimate Partner Violence: A Strangulation Case Review:* Strangulation often leaves few visible injuries, making it challenging to identify and prove in domestic violence cases. Using real footage, presenters discuss a New Hampshire case where a victim reported multiple instances of strangulation but showed no visible signs of injury. This 2025 online course was a product of a webinar, recorded

on October 31, 2024, that explored the effects of strangulation on the body and memory, the dynamics of domestic violence, and best practices for handling such cases from start to finish.

- *Stalking*: Stalking is a significant risk factor for lethal and non-lethal violence as well as increased risks of sexual assault, threats, and economic harm, yet is often minimized, denied, and dismissed.

### *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 producing two publications: *Non-Fatal Strangulation/Suffocation What Every Judge Should Know* and *Non-Fatal Strangulation/Suffocation: Four Common Myths*. These resources examine common misunderstandings about strangulation, the elements of the statute, information about how quickly the lack of oxygen affects the brain, as well as when judicial officers will encounter strangulation issues in court (e.g., bail setting, protection order hearings, restitution requests, trials, and sentencing).

### *Understanding Domestic Violence Firearms Prohibitions Publication*

Whether a person is prohibited from accessing firearms following a conviction in a domestic violence case or becoming subject to a protection order is not always clear. Federal law prohibits access to firearms in certain cases involving domestic violence, but not all. Ohio law does not mirror federal law but permits judges to prohibit firearms as a condition of protections orders under limited circumstances, not limited to domestic violence cases. The Advisory Committee created a publication *Understanding Domestic Violence Firearms Prohibitions* to help judges recognize when domestic violence is likely to lead to a firearms prohibition and what laws and rules govern their obligations as a result.

## **Access to Courts**

### *Effective Use of Interpreters*

The Advisory Committee became 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.

To increase access for Limited English Proficient crime victims, the Advisory Committee and Domestic Violence Program partnered with the Language Services Section and the statewide service providers for deaf survivors of domestic violence on a webinar *Beyond Words: Securing Interpreters for Courts and Client Meetings* held in July 2025. This course was hosted by the Columbus Bar Association, who invited the other metro bar associations to secure attendance statewide. Topics included the legal obligations to accommodate those who require foreign language or American Sign Language interpreters to access the court system; recognizing the

different qualifications for interpreters, and which interpreter is appropriate for various circumstances; and best practices for coordinating with court, legal, and community partners to ensure effective access for deaf individuals. Statewide domestic violence service providers also spoke to introduce their services for deaf survivors and how attorneys can access them with their clients.

#### *Updated Case Management Time Standards for Trial Courts*

The Court approved updated time standards for trial courts to ensure the timely disposition of cases. The Advisory Committee was instrumental in offering their expertise on the complexities that can accompany domestic violence cases. Members recommended the allowable disposition time for domestic violence civil protection orders (“DVCPO”) cases to be increased. The Court approved a new standard whereby 75% of DVCPO cases must be disposed of within three months, and 95% of cases resolved within six months. The new standard goes into effect in January 2026.

#### *Marsy’s Law*

Courts and justice partners continue to learn how to appropriately implement the statutory procedures detailing how crime victims can exercise their constitutional and statutory rights commonly known as “Marsy’s Law” (e.g., the right to receive notice, right to be heard, right to an attorney, right to appeal, etc.). The Advisory Committee devoted a portion of each meeting to following the latest case decisions and opinions to keep apprised of how the decisions affected domestic violence response. For example, the Ohio Attorney General opined in 2024-007 that protection afforded crime victims by R.C. 2930.07 against disclosure of identifying information applies only in limited circumstances in civil matters, and a clerk of court’s duty to redact a victim’s information from all records relating to a civil protection order is triggered only when the order is violated.

#### *Brain Injury and the Courts*

Emerging research suggests the prevalence of brain injury from violence experienced by the public is high and for those involved in the court system is significantly higher. Those who have experienced head trauma from violence often experience mental, behavioral, and cognitive effects as well as physical. Those suffering brain injury may seem disinterested or even defiant of court orders or requirements, when in fact they might not have been able to understand or comply with what was being asked of them. The Advisory Committee began a first of its kind, multi-year project with the Ohio State University Chronic Brain Injury Program, court partners, and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network to explore the impact of brain injury from violence on court access and appropriate response from courts and justice partners.

#### **Input on Policy**

##### *Rules of Court*

The Advisory Committee offered input on proposed changes and additions to the Rules of Court this year:

- The Advisory Committee was consulted on the proposed movement of protection orders from the Rules of Superintendence to the Rules of Practice and Procedure, as part of the effort being led by the Chief Justice, the Commission on Rules of Superintendence, and the Commission on Rules of Practice and Procedure, to ensure continuity of practice.
- The Advisory Committee proposed sections addressing protection order and domestic violence case reporting obligations for the update to Sup.R. 5 that requires local courts to adopt a local rule and compliance plan with justice partners to report to law enforcement to ensure completeness, accuracy, and comprehensive reporting to the Bureau of Criminal Investigation and other state and federal law enforcement entities to ensure accurate criminal histories.

### *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: expanding the offense of domestic violence to include those with whom the offender is in a dating relationship; prohibiting those with convictions to first degree misdemeanor domestic violence from possessing a firearm; increasing the penalty for repeat violent offenders while increasing the number of crimes that may be expunged; enhancing the penalties for human trafficking if the victim is a minor with disabilities; creating extreme risk protection orders; modifying the self-defense law; expanding the Address Confidentiality Program; altering the factors for analysis for parental rights and responsibilities; and prohibiting certain unauthorized deepfake recordings.

### **2026 Anticipated Projects**

In 2026, 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:* The Advisory Committee will continue to oversee trainings on the most common topics requested, including domestic violence dynamics and working with victims, the effect of domestic violence on children, strangulation and the law, and Ohio protection orders rules, practice, and forms.
- *Brain Injury from Violence Education and Pilot Project:* The Advisory Committee will continue to work with The Ohio State University Chronic Brain Injury Program, the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, and court partners to explore the impact of brain injury from violence on court users and identify promising practices to improve response by courts and justice partners and to ensure access for those with brain injury.
- *The Effects of Trauma on Access to Courts:* 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 plan 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 plans to continue to work with the Language Services Section and the two statewide domestic violence service providers for deaf individuals to plan 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.