

# 2024

## FATAL INCIDENT REVIEW TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

---

Domestic Violence  
Coordinating Council  
State of Delaware

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

The 2024 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 2023. 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 over the past three years, the Review Team continued to hold all reviews from a virtual posture in 2023.

Fatal Incident Review Team -----	2
2023 Domestic Violence-Related Deaths & Near Deaths -----	5
Domestic Violence Homicides -----	6
Victim & Perpetrator Demographics -----	7
FIRT Recommendations & Responses -----	10
Department of Justice -----	11
The Courts -----	13
Domestic Violence Coordinating Council-----	17
Delaware Hospitals & Healthcare Providers -----	19
What to Expect in 2024-----	20



# 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

Deputy AG Jenna Milecki  
The Honorable Jan R. Jurden  
Melanie Ewing-Lahutsky  
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.



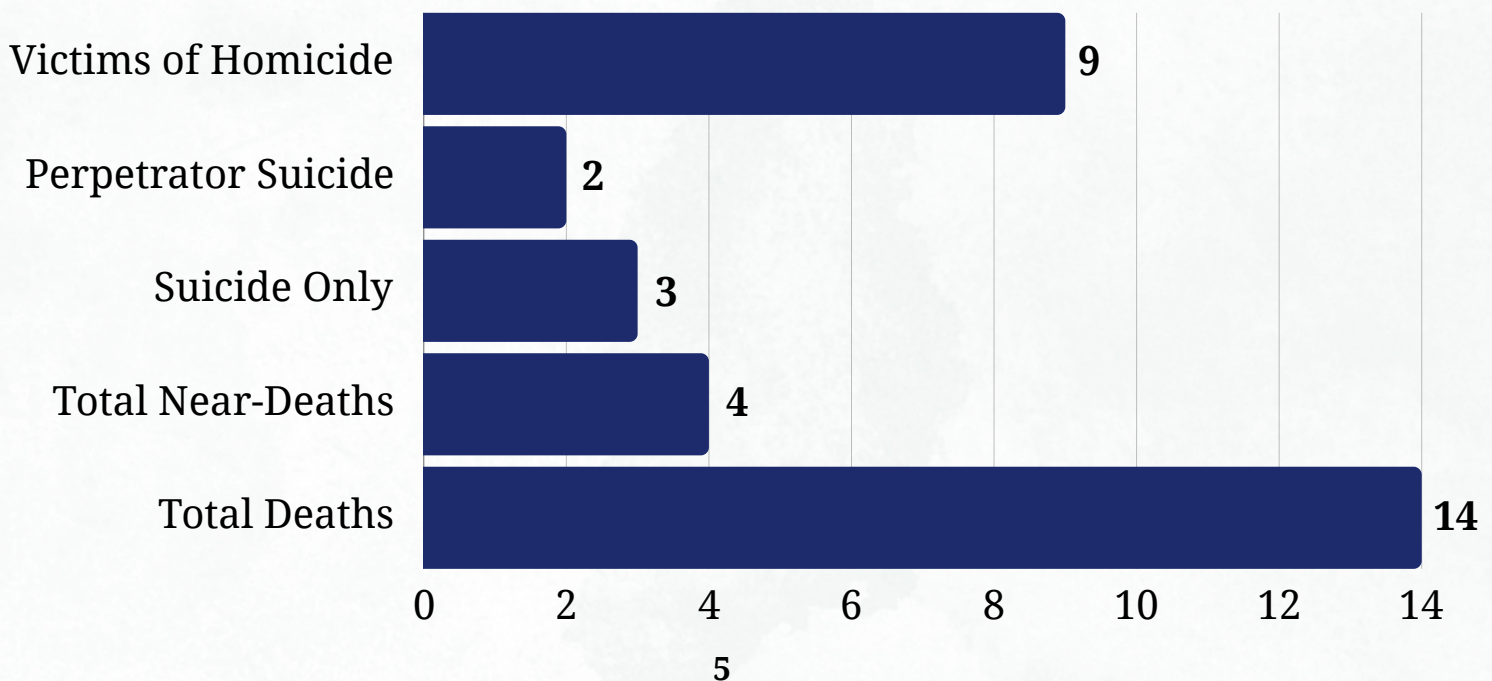
# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED DEATHS AND NEAR DEATHS

---

The DVCC tracks domestic violence-related deaths and near-deaths that occur throughout the State of Delaware. Domestic violence-related deaths and near-deaths include victims, perpetrators, or bystanders if the incident 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 2023, there were a total of **fifteen** domestic violence related death and near-death incidents; **nine** of those incidents were homicide or homicide/suicide cases, including **nine** victims of domestic violence homicide and **two** perpetrator suicides. There were **three** domestic violence related suicides and **three** near-death only incidents including **four** near-death victims. All together there were a total of **fourteen** domestic violence related deaths and **four** near-deaths in Delaware in 2023.

## 2023 AT A GLANCE



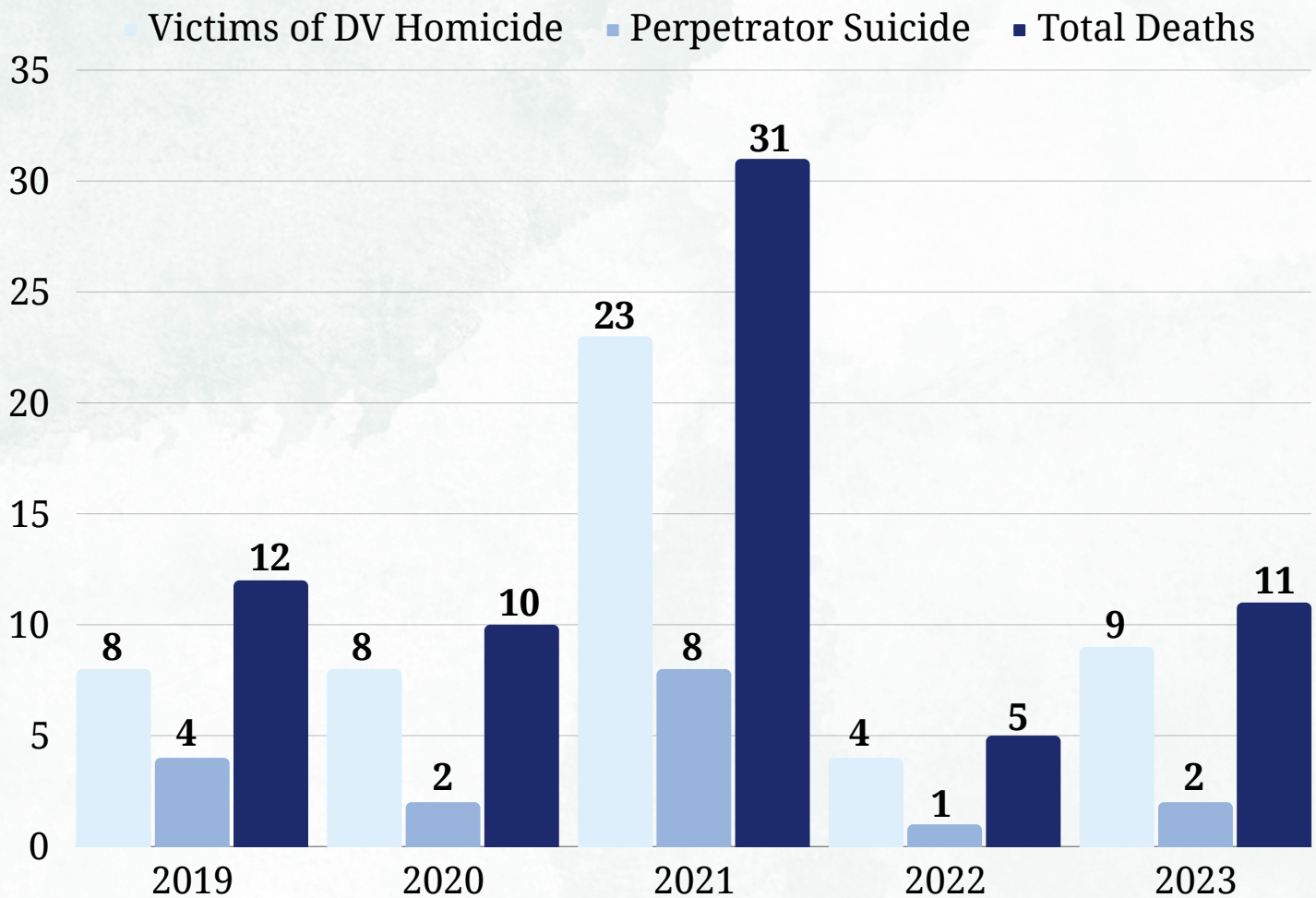


# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED HOMICIDES

---

Of the **fifteen** domestic violence related death and near-death incidents in 2023, **nine** were homicide cases including **nine** victims of domestic violence homicide and **two** perpetrator suicides. This graph does not reflect suicide only deaths.\*

## HOMICIDE INCIDENT DEATHS



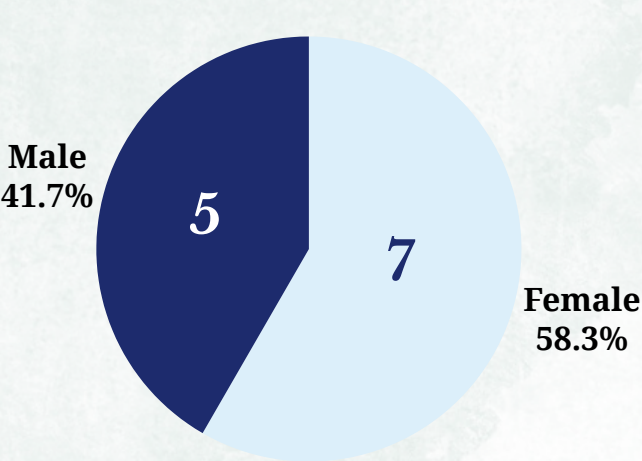
\*Domestic violence-related suicides are counted separately from the murder/suicide cases. The suicide only cases are victims or perpetrators who have taken their own lives and have a history of abuse by or toward their partner.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED DEATHS AND NEAR DEATHS

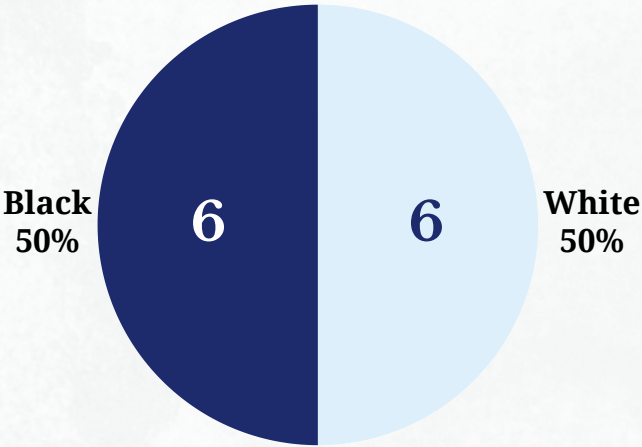
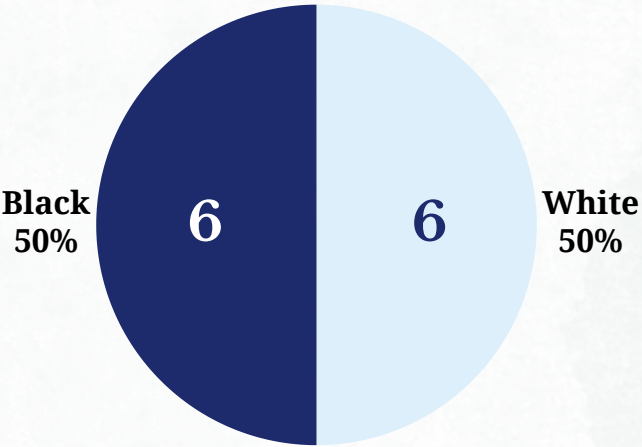
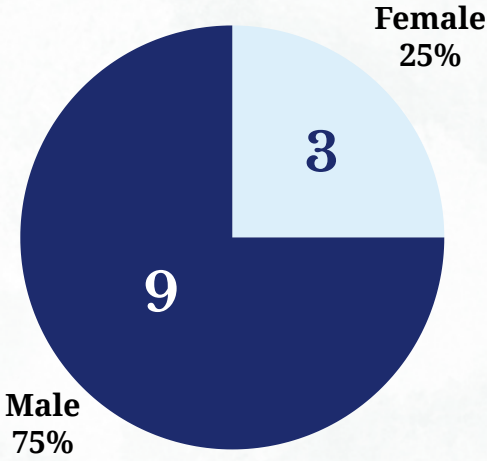
## Victim & Perpetrator Demographics

The demographics of the twelve domestic violence death and near-death incidents in 2023\* were as follows:

Victim Sex & Race



Perpetrator Sex & Race



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



# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED DEATHS AND NEAR DEATHS

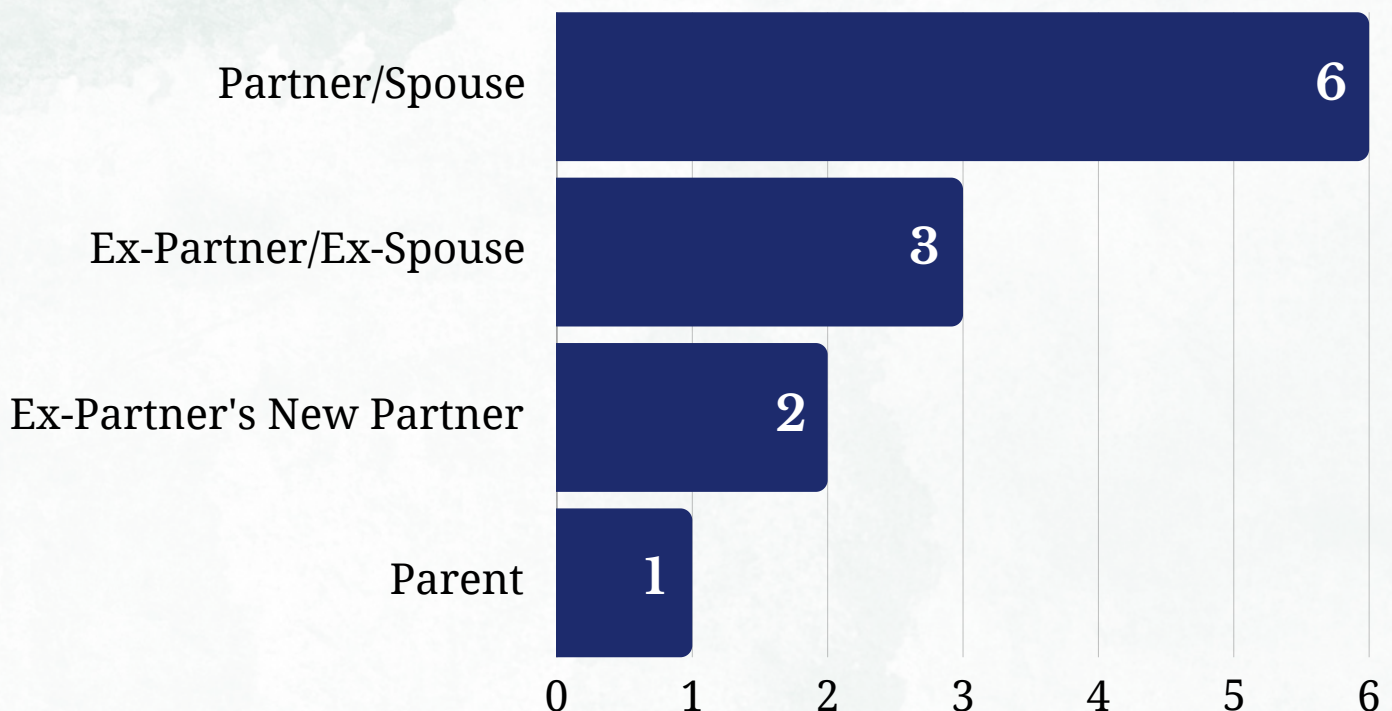
## Victim & Perpetrator Demographics

The demographics of the twelve domestic violence death and near-death incidents in 2023\* were as follows:

The graphs on the following two pages depict the ages of both victims and perpetrators, the relationships between victims and perpetrators, and the causes of death or injury for each incident.

Of the **twelve** homicide/near-homicide incidents, **eleven** involved a current or former intimate partner relationship. **One** involved a parent and child.

### Victim & Perpetrator Relationship



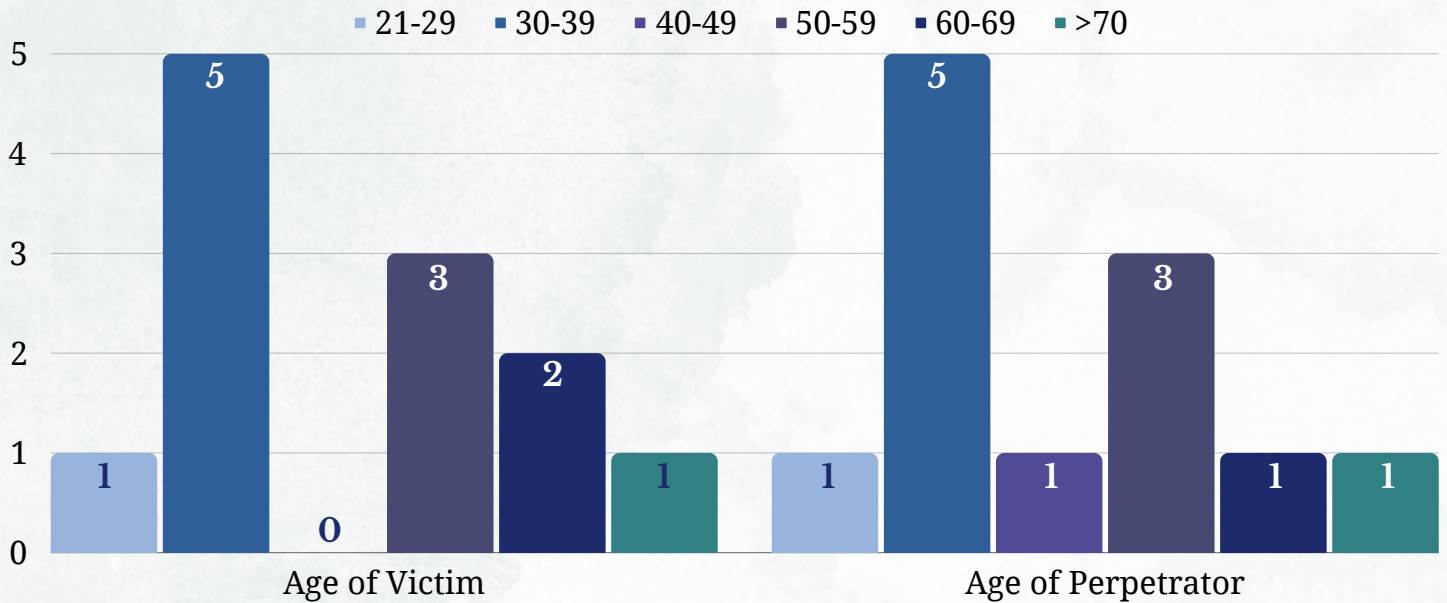
\*These cases have not been reviewed by the Fatal Incident Review Team

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED DEATHS AND NEAR DEATHS

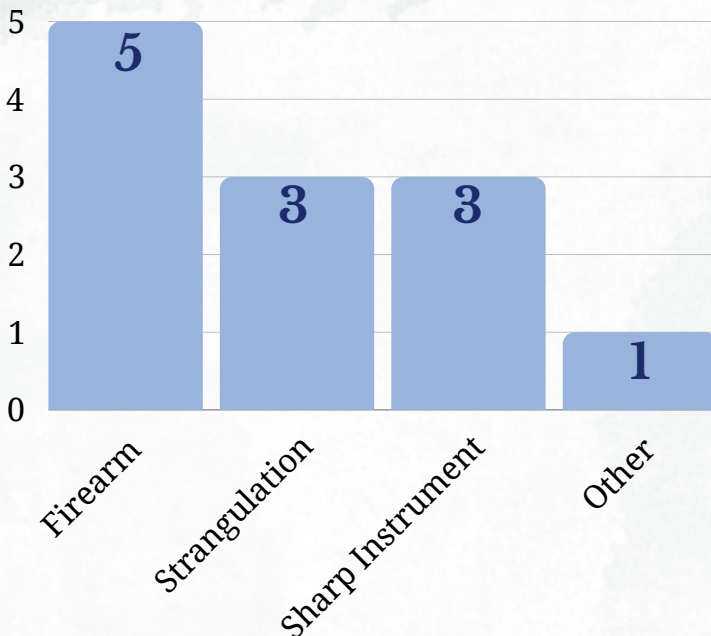
## Victim & Perpetrator Demographics

The demographics of the twelve domestic violence death and near-death incidents in 2023\* were as follows:

### Victim & Perpetrator Age



### Cause of Death/Injury



Firearms continue to be the leading cause of death and serious injury in domestic violence related incidents. This year, **five** of the incidents involved firearms.

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



# 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.



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## Department of Justice

### FIRT RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Justice should establish a policy stating that Deputy Attorneys General handling Weapons Relinquishment Orders are trained in domestic violence dynamics.

### RESPONSE:

“ —

We agree with FIRT’s recommendation. Our office has undergone personnel changes recently including an addition to the Lethal Violence Protection Order (LVPO) Team. We anticipate that all Deputy Attorneys General on our LVPO Team will have completed training on this matter by the end of this year [2023]. It is our intention to implement this recommendation as an ongoing requirement for our LVPO Team.

-AG Kathy Jennings



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## Department of Justice

### FIRT RECOMMENDATION:

The Fatal Incident Review Team recognizes the efforts of the Department of Justice and the importance of their work and recommends the expeditious expansion of the Domestic Violence Unit to Kent and Sussex counties.

### RESPONSE:

“ —

Hiring more prosecutors to formally expand the DV units in all counties remains a top priority for the Department of Justice.

-AG Kathy Jennings



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## The Courts

### FIRT RECOMMENDATION:

The Court should collaborate with the DVCC to ensure its judicial officers receive regular training on domestic violence, including but not limited to, training on Delaware specific DV treatment programs and resources.

### RESPONSE: Justice of the Peace Court

“ —

All Justice of the Peace Court judicial officers must complete 30 hours of continuing legal education training every two years. They also attend educational seminars biannually and have monthly judges' meetings. Domestic violence training is included in the biannual trainings. during the past three years, Delaware specific DV treatment programs and resources were included in at least one of the biannual trainings each year.

The Justice of the Peace Court is committed to dedicating a portion of the continuing training efforts to domestic violence training including, but not limited to, training on Delaware specific DV treatment programs and resources.



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## The Courts

### FIRT RECOMMENDATION:

The Court should collaborate with the DVCC to ensure its judicial officers receive regular training on domestic violence, including but not limited to, training on Delaware specific DV treatment programs and resources.

### RESPONSE: Court of Common Pleas

“ —

The Court’s jurisdiction over domestic violence matters is limited and has been further reduced over the past several years. Nevertheless, the Court agrees that periodic refresher training on domestic violence issues is appropriate for Court of Common Pleas’ judicial officers.

The Court has received training on some domestic violence issues in the past at statewide training events and will seek out opportunities for additional training. Given the limited time available for training annual training is not currently contemplated.



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## The Courts

### FIRST RECOMMENDATION:

The Court should collaborate with the DVCC to ensure its judicial officers receive regular training on domestic violence, including but not limited to, training on Delaware specific DV treatment programs and resources.

### RESPONSE: Superior Court

“ —

The Court agrees with the recommendation and we will continue to collaborate with DVCC to ensure judicial officers receive the training recommended.



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## The Courts

### FIRT RECOMMENDATION:

The Court should collaborate with the DVCC to ensure its judicial officers receive regular training on domestic violence, including but not limited to, training on Delaware specific DV treatment programs and resources.

### RESPONSE: Family Court

“ —

Family Court regularly trains on domestic violence at least annually, if not two to three times each year. Additionally, all judicial officers attend the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' Enhancing Judicial Skills in Domestic Violence intensive three day training. Family Court collaborates with the DVCC on in-state trainings and the Chief Judge's designee chairs the DVCC Training Committee. The treatment providers are regularly invited to present at countywide and statewide meetings of the judicial officers.



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

### **FIRT RECOMMENDATION:**

The DVCC should explore ways to improve communication between the Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Correction (DOC), and community providers of DV treatment to better facilitate a multidisciplinary approach to high-risk cases.

The DVCC should continue the work of the Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT) and expand the team to serve all three counties to improve communication and collaboration between state and community stakeholders addressing high risk domestic violence cases.

The DVCC should explore ways to enhance safe, trauma informed language access for survivors interacting with system based and community based domestic violence resources.

The DVCC should collaborate with the Department of Correction to promote awareness of the Probation & Parole After Hours Domestic Violence Response Team as a resource to improve offender accountability.



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

### RESPONSES:

“ —

The DVCC Treatment Committee, with representatives from DOJ, DOC, and treatment providers, will explore ways to improve communication between the agencies and community providers to better facilitate a multidisciplinary approach to high-risk cases.

The DVCC Criminal Justice Committee will explore the possibility of expanding the DVHRT statewide and identify barriers and funding resources to support the expansion.

The DVCC Immigration Committee will explore options for enhancing safe, trauma informed language access for survivors interacting with systems-based and community-based DV resources.

The DVCC Criminal Justice Committee will explore ways to promote awareness of Probation and Parole's After Hours DV Response Team as a resource to improve offender accountability.



# 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS & RESPONSES

---

## Delaware Hospitals & Healthcare Providers

### **FIRT RECOMMENDATION:**

In reviewing domestic violence related homicides in Delaware, it is apparent that not all victims will access traditional criminal justice services, noting that reluctant victims need other ways to learn about their safety risks and access protective strategies. Domestic violence screenings in healthcare settings serve as a critical early intervention point for connecting victims to services. Therefore, the Fatal Incident Review Team recommends that healthcare providers and administrators strengthen domestic violence screenings, with an emphasis on trauma-informed care in all healthcare settings, to best protect survivors of domestic violence.

### **RESPONSE:**

“ ———

DVCC staff and the DVCC Medical Committee are collaborating to have this recommendation distributed to Delaware Healthcare Association, and to provide support to hospitals and other healthcare settings in carrying out this recommendation.



# WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2024

In 2024, 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.



In 2024, the team plans to update its Rules & Procedures and hopefully receive additional technical assistance from the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative.

2024

## 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

Kent & Sussex Counties:

Domestic Violence 302 422-8058

Rape Crisis 1-800-773-8570

Bi-lingual 302 745-9874

---

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

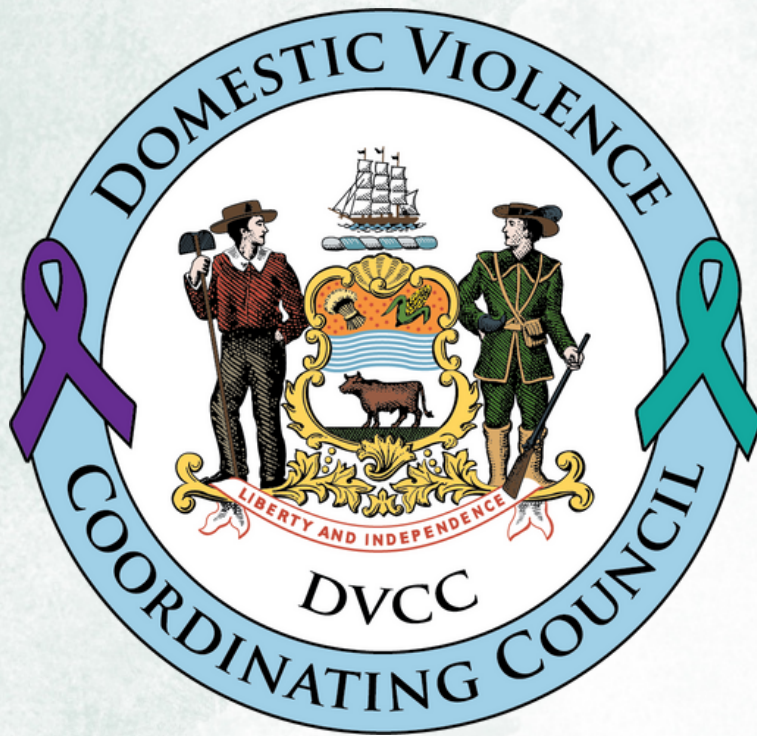
Milford, DE 19963

Phone: 302 424-7238

Fax: 302 424-5311

**DVCC.DELAWARE.GOV**





**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
COORDINATING COUNCIL**

**DVCC.DELAWARE.GOV**