



Montgomery County Domestic Violence Fatality Review

2024 Annual Report

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Executive Summary

The Montgomery County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT) is a multidisciplinary group of professionals and community members that meets regularly to examine the circumstances leading to fatalities and near-fatalities that occurred between intimate partners in Montgomery County, Maryland. From 2017-2024, the Montgomery County DVFRT completed a review of sixteen domestic violence-related cases that resulted in death or serious injury. The sixteen cases reviewed included thirteen homicides and three attempted homicides. One of the homicide cases included a secondary victim. Six of the homicides also involved offender suicide. The cases reviewed occurred between 2008-2023. The data findings in this report are cumulative from 2017-2024. Multiple factors were assessed, including the following: gender, age, weapon ownership and use, child witness, precipitating event(s), history of arrest or conviction, interventions sought, and convictions/outcome. For the cases reviewed in 2024, the Montgomery County DVFRT made findings and recommendations related to the following topics: education, outreach, training, policy, and mental health.

Team Members

Montgomery County (MC) DVFRT Officers: Debbie Feinstein, MC-DVFRT Chair, Chief, Special Victims Division, Montgomery County Office of the State's Attorney; Core Talcott, MC-DVFRT Vice-Chair, Chief, Health and Human Services Division

Community Organizations: Jenna Balaban, Managing Attorney, House of Ruth Maryland (Former); Jenica Kramer, Staff Attorney (Former), House of Ruth Maryland; Luanne Edwards, Attorney (Former), House of Ruth Maryland; Donna Rismiller, Attorney, Executive Director, DVS Legal Services; Amy Palumbo, Attorney, Program Director, DVS Legal Services; Andrea Ortiz, Clinical Director, Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse; Julia Dowling, Clinician, Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse

Hospital Based Health Care Provider: Dr. Jessica Volz, Clinical Director of Forensics, Forensic Medical Unit, Adventist Healthcare Shady Grove Medical Center; Vania Baioni, Forensic Nurse Examiner, Forensic Medical Unit, Adventist Healthcare Shady Grove Medical Center

Maryland Judiciary, Commissioner's Office: Julie Gray, Administrative Commissioner, 6th District Court of Maryland; Christine Sim, Managing Commissioner, 6th District Court of Maryland

Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services: Ingrid Gonzalez (Retired), Field Supervisor, Division of Parole and Probation

Montgomery County Department of Correction and Rehabilitation: Kendra Jochum, Deputy Warden, Programs and Services, Detention Services Division; Shaunda Legg, Reentry Services, Detention Services Division

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (HHS): Peaches Wilson, Supervisory Therapist, HHS Trauma Services; Laura Erstling, Assessment Section Manager, Child Welfare Services; Ilana Kein, Assessment Unit Supervisor, Child Welfare Services

Montgomery County Department of Police: Montgomery County Department of Police: Assistant Chief Nicholas Augustine, Chief, Investigative Services Bureau (Former); Captain Gerald McFarland, Director, Special Victims Investigations Division (Former); Captain Jeffrey Bunge, Director, Special Victims Investigations Division; Lieutenant David Cohen, Deputy Director, Special Victims Investigations Division; Lieutenant Kenneth Sanger, Deputy Director, Major Crimes Division (Former); Sergeant Sun Cheoung, Supervisor, Special Victims Investigations Division, Domestic Violence Unit (Former)

Montgomery County Public Schools: Dr. Kyle Potter, Coordinator, Student Health and Wellness

Montgomery County Office of the County Attorney: Corey Talcott, Chief, Health and Human Services Division

Montgomery County Office of the Sheriff: Lieutenant Colonel Keena Jones, Assistant Sheriff; Captain Michael Brickles, Domestic Violence Section, Family Division; Lieutenant Ralph Aloï, Domestic Violence Section, Family Division; Smita Varia, Program Manager, Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

Montgomery County Office of the State's Attorney: Christina Miles, Division Director, Special Victims Division (Former); Nicole Brito, Division Director, Special Victims Division

Montgomery County DVFRT Staff: Ashley Noy Domestic Violence Prevention Program Manager, Montgomery County Family Justice Center, Montgomery County Office of the Sheriff

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the dedicated county agencies, community partners and individual members for their contributions to the review process.

Thank you to the following people for your continued support and allocation of dedicated staff to participate in the review process:

- County Executive Marc Elrich
- The Honorable John McCarthy, Montgomery County State's Attorney
- Montgomery County Sheriff Maxwell Uy
- Montgomery County Police Chief Marc Yamada
- Dr. James C. Bridges, Director, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
- Ben Stevenson, Director, Montgomery County Department of Correction and Rehabilitation
- The Honorable John Markovs, Montgomery County Attorney
- Carolyn L. Scruggs, Secretary, Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services
- Deena Hausner, Director, Marjorie Cook Legal Clinic, House of Ruth Maryland
- Dr. Thomas W. Taylor, Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools
- Donna Rismiller, Executive Director, DVS Legal Services
- Amanda Katz, Executive Director, Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse
- Dan Cochran, President, Adventist Healthcare Shady Grove Medical Center

We extend our sincerest gratitude to Ashley Noy, Domestic Violence Prevention Program Manager, for her tireless coordination efforts and for keeping our team moving in a forward and productive direction.

About the Montgomery County DVFRT Mission

The mission of the Montgomery County DVFRT is to:

- 1) Achieve a better understanding of why and how people are injured and/or die in domestic violence-related incidents;
- 2) Find ways to improve community involvement, work collaboratively in responding to, effectively addressing, and preventing domestic violence-related deaths and serious injuries; and
- 3) Formulate recommendations for systemic improvements in individual agency policies and protocols to prevent domestic violence-related deaths and serious injuries.

The Montgomery County DVFRT is one of eleven regional DVFRTs in Maryland. DVFRTs were authorized by the Maryland General Assembly in 2005, and the Montgomery County DVFRT was established in 2005.

Purpose

The purpose of Montgomery County DVFRT is to prevent deaths and serious injuries related to domestic violence. This purpose is accomplished by:

- 1) Promoting a coordinated community response among agencies that provide domestic violence-related services;
- 2) Identifying gaps in service and developing an understanding of the causes that result in deaths and serious injuries to domestic violence; and
- 3) Recommending changes, plans and actions to improve:
 - a. coordination related to domestic violence among member agencies,
 - b. the response to domestic violence by individual member agencies, and
 - c. state and local laws, policies, and practices.

Case Review Process

Selection of Cases for Review

The Montgomery County DVFRT (hereinafter referred to as DVFRT or Team) reviews domestic violence-related deaths or serious injuries that occur in Montgomery County, Maryland. The review process begins with the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) compiling a list of cases.

Cases include those that have been adjudicated through trial and sentencing or have resulted in the death of the perpetrator. The DVFRT Case Screening Committee (CSC) determines which domestic violence homicide and attempted homicide cases that the Team will review at each meeting. Per the request of the Chair, the Team is given the names of the victim and offender and other basic identifying information to gather information pertinent to the case. The cases selected for review occurred between 2008-present year.

Gathering Information

The Team is asked to research agency and organization files to locate records they have on the parties involved in the case. The Team may also request records and information from agencies and organizations that do not participate as DVFRT members, as authorized by statute Section 4-705 of

the Family Law Article of Maryland Annotated Code. The release of medical records is covered by federal statute under HIPAA, however exceptions are made for release of information mandated by state law, such as the Team statute.

The Team may also choose to interview certain informed individuals that had contact with the involved parties. Informed individuals can include family and non-family members of the parties involved in the case. If the Team determines that the individual may have information relevant to the review, a designated team member will request and, if granted, conduct an interview with that individual. Interviews of informed individuals will often be assigned to counselors and advocates due to the sensitive nature of the discussion. All information gathered by the Team will be shared at the DVFRT meetings.

Review Meetings

The Chair convenes meetings monthly to review selected cases. DVFRT meetings are comprised of two parts, public and confidential. Members of the public are welcome to attend the public portion of the meeting where the Team discusses general community issues and events related to domestic violence. The Team reviews cases during the confidential portion of the meeting, which is open only to designated team members. Before the confidential portion of the meeting is called to order, all Team members in attendance are required to sign a sworn statement honoring the confidentiality of the information, records, discussions, and opinions disclosed during case review. A breach of confidentiality by any member results in removal from that member and possible prosecution under Section 4-706 or 4-707 of the Family Law Article of the Maryland Annotated Code.

The Chair calls to order and presides over the discussion. A member of the Montgomery County Police Department typically offers the initial case overview. Other Team members present relevant information from gathered records, documents, and interviews. When reviewing cases, the Team analyzes the following: the facts and circumstances surrounding the death or serious injury of the victim; the possible gaps in services, coordination of services, and systems response; and individual, relationship, community and societal risk factors associated with the case.

Findings, Recommendations and Annual Report

After case analysis, the Team offers specific findings and recommendations. Finalized findings and recommendations are reached by consensus. The Team's recommended actions aim to prevent deaths and serious injuries related to domestic violence. Recommendations are collected throughout the year and are not attributed to any one specific case. Findings and recommendations collected during the calendar year are included in a written annual report, which is disseminated the following year.

Cumulative Data Collection Findings: 2017-2024 Case Review

From 2017-2024, the Team reviewed sixteen domestic violence cases involving sixteen victims. Of the sixteen victims, twelve were intimate partner homicide victims, one was a child of a victim who died by homicide and three were intimate partner attempted homicide victims. The following are the prominent findings from the Team's review:

Demographics

- Fourteen of the sixteen homicide and attempted homicide victims were female, and fourteen of the sixteen offenders were male.
- One of the homicide victims was under the age of 18.
- Two of the homicide victims were pregnant.
- The average age of victims was 36 years old, with an age range of 11 to 51 years old. The average age of offenders was 41 years old, with an age range of 27 to 52 years old.

Weapons

- Offenders used guns as the fatal or near-fatal agent in six of the cases. Five of the cases involved the use of a blunt instrument, six of the cases involved the use of a knife, and in two of the cases, the offender used their hands or feet as the fatal or near-fatal agent. Some cases involved more than one fatal or near-fatal agent.
- Three of the sixteen offenders used more than one type of weapon as the fatal or near-fatal agent.

Involvement of Children

- In one of the sixteen cases, the offender killed a child after the homicide of the intimate partner.
- Five of the sixteen cases involved children who were present during the homicide or attempted homicide. In three of those five cases, children directly witnessed the homicide or attempted homicide.

Precipitating Circumstances

- Nine of the sixteen cases involved either termination or separation of the intimate partner relationship and a belief or perception that the victim had a new intimate partner.
- One of the sixteen cases involved cultural and religious stressors within the intimate partner relationship.
- One of the sixteen cases involved financial stressors within the intimate partner relationship.

History

- The available historical information from ten of the sixteen cases demonstrated some history of domestic violence between the victim and the offender.
- Six of the sixteen offenders had a documented history of arrest or conviction for non-domestic violence offenses.
- One of the sixteen offenders had a documented history of childhood abandonment and trauma.
- Seven of the sixteen offenders had a documented history of alcohol or drug abuse.
- Four of the sixteen victims sought law enforcement intervention and/or obtained a protective order prior to the homicide or attempted homicide. None of the victims sought or received victim services prior to the homicide or attempted homicide.
- Three of the sixteen victims had a domestic violence history with a former intimate partner and were ultimately killed by another intimate partner.

Perpetrator Outcomes

- One of the offenders completed an abuser intervention program pending trial and, since release from incarceration, has not reoffended.
- Six of the sixteen offenders died by suicide: four died by suicide immediately after perpetrating the homicide or attempted homicide, and two died by suicide after they were convicted of first-degree murder. One of the offenders attempted suicide sometime after perpetrating the homicide but survived the attempt.
- All nine of the living offenders were charged and convicted of criminal offenses: six were found guilty of first-degree murder; one was found guilty of two counts of first degree murder; two were found guilty of attempted first degree murder; and one was charged with second degree assault, indicted on attempted second degree murder and first degree assault, but was ultimately found guilty on the second degree assault charge only.

Recommendations: 2024 Case Reviews

Education and Outreach

Finding: During the 2024 case reviews, the Team discovered no prior reports of physical or emotional domestic abuse. The Team learned, however, that the offender perpetrated other types of abuse, including emotional abuse, manipulation and coercive control. This finding is supported by the 2003 Jackie Campbell research article, which states that 30% of women killed did not have a reported history of physical abuse prior to the homicide.

Recommendation: The Team recommends continuing community education about the different types of abuse and that domestic violence affects everyone, including people of all genders, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, races, and religions.

Accomplishments:

In October 2024 members of the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Education and Outreach Committee launched a campaign named, *Still Abuse* to raise awareness on Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The campaign, *Still Abuse* illustrated the different types of abuse a victim may experience and emphasized that abuse is not only physical. During the month of October, *Still Abuse* campaign videos were displayed in movie theaters in Gaithersburg and Silver Spring and on social media accounts, and posters were displayed throughout the county that included information about the Montgomery County Family Justice Center.

Finding: During the 2024 case reviews, the Team found that pregnancy increases the lethality risk for individuals who are in relationships where domestic violence is present. The Team identified that although no prior history of physical abuse was reported, there were signs of behaviors consistent with narcissistic traits from the perpetrator, increasing a victim's lethality. This finding is supported by the 2022 article *This Is Why Narcissists Get You Pregnant* which states that if an unplanned pregnancy occurs the perpetrator may feel a sense of entrapment.

Recommendation: The Team recommends that medical professionals ask questions about domestic violence/abuse and that medical offices distribute/make available literature with resources about local services, including the Family Justice Center and Trauma Services.

DVCC- Education and Outreach Committee:

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Education and Outreach Committee is working on an initiative for medical providers in the community that offers training and education on domestic violence and services offered in the county.

Accomplishments:

During the 2024 Domestic Violence Awareness Month the Family Justice Center Training Institute along with Maryland Health Care coalition Against Domestic Violence conducted two webinars designed for Montgomery County health care providers. The webinar on "The Health Care Response to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Abuse During Pregnancy" was well received by medical providers throughout the county. The Education and Outreach committee continues to reach out to medical providers to periodically conduct the webinars.

Mental Health

Finding: When reviewing the 2024 cases, the Team found that some offenders arrested for domestic violence committed suicide.

Recommendation: The Team recommends further research and exploration of the correlation between offenders committing suicide after arrest or conviction for domestic-related homicide or assault.

References

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