

# **2024 Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee Annual Report**

A report to the Illinois Governor and General Assembly

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority  
60 E. Van Buren St., Suite 650  
Chicago, IL 60605  
312-793-8550  
[www.icjia.illinois.gov](http://www.icjia.illinois.gov)

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Legislation.....	1
Need for the Work.....	1
Organizational Structure.....	3
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA).....	3
Illinois Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee (DVFRC).....	3
DVFRC Funding and Staff.....	4
Officers.....	4
Members.....	4
Pioneer Teams.....	6
Partners.....	6
Operations and Activities.....	7
DVFRC.....	7
Meetings.....	7
Training and Technical Assistance.....	8
Website.....	9
Data Source Analysis.....	9
Regional Review Teams.....	9
3 <sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Madison and Bond counties.....	10
12th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Will County.....	10
17th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Winnebago and Boone counties.....	11
19th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Lake County.....	12
21st Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Kankakee and Iroquois counties.....	12
Challenges and Lessons Learned.....	14
Regional Team Funding.....	14
Confidentiality: A Barrier to Accessing Records.....	14
Looking Forward.....	15
DVFRC Meetings.....	15
2025 Regional Review Team Recruitment.....	15
Continued Development of the DVFR Guidebook.....	15

## **Acknowledgements**

The Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee (DVFRC) would like to thank the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), including Executive Director Delrice Adams and staff, for supporting the important work of the DVFRC.

We are especially grateful for the continued support of Dr. Neil Websdale and his team from the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative for sharing their knowledge, experience, and passion for this work. Their guidance continues to move the domestic violence fatality review initiative forward in Illinois.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the operations and activities of the Illinois Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee (DVFRC) and the regional review teams in 2024.

### **Legislation**

The DVFRC was established as an Ad Hoc Committee of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) Board in 2021, pursuant to the [Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Act](#) (the Act; 750 ILCS 62).

The DVFRC was formed as a response to the significant effects of domestic violence, specifically fatal or near-fatal violence, on Illinois families, the economy, and other violent crimes. It oversees the establishment of regional domestic violence fatality review teams, providing support through trainings, the gathering of domestic violence fatality data, and technical assistance in the fatality case review process (750 ILCS 62/20). The DVFRC began meeting in January 2022 and continues to meet regularly to carry out its mandate.

### **Need for the Work**

As documented in the Act, ICJIA “found that ... over 100,000 domestic violence offenses were reported to Illinois law enforcement each year between 2005 and 2017,” and “[b]etween 400,000 and nearly 600,000 orders of protection were filed each year” in that same timeframe (750 ILCS 62/10(d)). Domestic violence can lead to near-fatal and fatal violence. In fact, ICJIA found that “15% of all homicides in this State are connected to domestic violence” (750 ILCS 62/10 (g)). The stark reality of these homicides looks like children without mothers, fathers without children, and entire families gone in Illinois. The connection, however, between domestic violence and homicides is often missed. For example, initial media reports of homicides may not identify domestic violence as part of the story. Even if prior domestic violence is uncovered, the media may not update that reporting, leaving the public to categorize that story as simply a homicide.

One victim story discussed at a DVFRC meeting involved a victim who reported to be living with the alleged offender, yet the media that reported on the homicide did not reference domestic violence. In its 2023 Annual Domestic Violence Homicide Report, the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) noted “there were 94 incidents of domestic violence which led to 120 deaths in 2023.” The Act also found that domestic violence homicide is preventable.

Domestic violence fatality reviews aim to prevent future fatalities and near-fatalities related to domestic violence and to reduce the severity and frequency of domestic violence incidents. Fatality review teams have been established in other fields, including those specific to fatalities involving child victims (National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention); elder abuse and neglect (American Bar Association’s Elder Abuse Fatality Review); suicide (Suicide Mortality Review Committee, Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Association); and, more recently, deaths related to the opioid epidemic (state overdose fatality review teams).

Domestic violence fatality reviews are conducted by multi-disciplinary, multiagency teams of stakeholders who examine various sources of data about the days, months, and years leading up to a person's death or near death. These data sources may include interviews with family members, friends, or neighbors; child welfare, health, legal, education, or employment records; and witness accounts.

For domestic violence fatality reviews, the goals are to look at system vulnerabilities that lead to adverse outcomes for survivors, victims, and their families; to identify policy and practice recommendations that will improve communication, collaboration, and coordination among government agencies and service providers; and to support the implementation of those recommended changes. Over 200 domestic violence fatality review teams exist across the United States, with some operating for more than 20 years (750 ILCS 62/10 (m)). Those teams engage in system reform to “improve the response to domestic violence and reduce and prevent domestic violence-related fatalities and near-fatalities” (750 ILCS 62/10 (m)).

One purpose of the DVFRC and regional review teams is to recommend to the Governor's Office ways for individual communities as well as state, social services, and justice systems to intervene with families experiencing domestic violence before the near-fatality or fatality occurs. As the Illinois General Assembly has found, “effective responses to domestic violence and domestic violence-related fatalities involve governmental, social services, and other systems in the community. A coordinated and consistent approach among community and system points of intervention are important to fostering the safety, stability, well-being, and healing of survivors, and facilitating meaningful engagement with and sustainable accountability for offenders” (750 ILCS 62/10 (j)).

In part, the path to prevention relies on understanding where victims, survivors, and those who cause harm interact with Illinois' community, social services, and justice systems, along with the context of their lives at those times. The regional review teams, supported by the DVFRC, explore those points in time as well as red flags for violence within the contexts of their lives and relationships.

## **Organizational Structure**

The DVFR initiative consists of a two-tiered structure composed of the DVFRC and regional review teams. The Committee is an extension of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), and the regional review teams are supported by both the project director and the DVFRC.

### **Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA)**

The ICJIA is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice by bringing together key leaders from the justice system and the public to identify critical issues facing the criminal justice system in Illinois. As mentioned, the DVFRC is an Ad Hoc Committee of the ICJIA Board. The DVFRC is required to hire a full-time program manager to carry out its duties (750 ILCS 62/40 (a)(1)). A project director was hired to provide staffing and support to the DVFRC and its regional review teams, as allowed by the Act. The project director also provides administrative support to the DVFRC and technical assistance to regional review teams.

### **Illinois Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee (DVFRC)**

The DVFRC is comprised of subject matter experts within the Illinois legislature, law enforcement and the justice system. It also includes specialists in domestic and sexual violence, researchers, and personnel from other agencies and systems that are often involved with persons experiencing domestic violence. As the stakeholders in reducing domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities, these individuals' presence on the DVFRC is critical to the success of the initiative. They bring their expertise to bear by engaging their colleagues in the process of creating regional review teams, by helping teams overcome barriers to accessing information or support, and by offering training for the DVFRC and regional review teams. They are also responsible for creating guidelines and model policies for teams and for submitting annual and biennial reports to the Governor and General Assembly.

The DVFRC is required to hold meetings at least quarterly and to establish and maintain a website (750 ILCS 62/40 (a)(1-5)). It is responsible for initially recruiting the regional review teams, shepherding the teams through the on-boarding process, and supporting them through training and technical assistance, most often provided by the DVFRC co-chairs and project director. Technical assistance can include brainstorming with a team if they run into roadblocks when trying to obtain documents or recruit someone to the team. It can also include making updates to the DVFR regional review teams' foundation document, the Guidebook. The Guidebook is a living document of sample forms, policies, and best practice information on each phase of the domestic violence fatality review process. The Committee also oversees regional review team membership changes to ensure access to ICJIA's secure storage site for case documentation. Finally, the DVFRC is mandated with compiling policy and system recommendations from each regional review team and making recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly every other year (750 ILCS 62/10 (j)).

## ***DVFC Funding and Staff***

As noted above, the project director is tasked with carrying out the duties and responsibilities of the DVFC and with supporting regional domestic violence fatality review teams in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. The Act allows the DVFC to hire additional staff, as well, subject to availability of funds for that purpose and subject to approval by the DVFC (750 ILCS 62/40 (b)(8)). During 2024, ICJIA transitioned administrative support for the initiative from the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) to ICJIA. This transition ended the staffing contract with ICADV and moved all staffing responsibilities to ICJIA. In SFY25, ICJIA received a \$350,000 state appropriation to support the DVFC. ICJIA hired a project director manager in November 2024 to provide staffing and support to the DVFC and its regional review teams.

### ***Officers***

Sara Block and Megan Alderden were elected co- chairs by the voting members in 2022. They both continued to serve as DVFC Co-Chairs in 2024. Jenny Schoenwetter was elected Secretary in 2022 and continued in that role in 2024.

### ***Members***

DVFC member appointments began in January 2022, in accordance with the terms of the Act (750 ILCS 62/25-30). The Act requires DVFC membership to be diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, and geography. Membership includes staggered-term voting members and ex-officio, non-voting members. Initially, half of the members were designated by a drawing to serve two-year terms, and the other half were designated to serve three-year terms. After those initial terms, members then serve three-year terms. In 2024, members included:

**Dr. Megan Alderden, Co-Chair**  
Associate Professor of  
Criminology DePaul University

**Hon. Andrew Hires**  
Richland County Sheriff

**Dr. Jacob Stelter**  
Attending Emergency  
Physician  
Northshore University Health  
System

**Hon. Robert J. Anderson**  
Judge, Retired,  
18<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit

**Carolyn Klarquist**  
Supervisor & Assistant  
Defender Office of the State  
Appellate Defender

**Cassandra Tanner Miller\***  
Survivor, DV Advocate  
Founder, Colton's Legacy

**Willette Benford**  
Survivor and Senior Advisor  
Office of MK Pritzker

**Lt. Colonel Dan Likens**  
Assistant Deputy Director  
Division of Criminal  
Investigations  
Illinois State Police

**Teresa L. Tudor\***  
Program Administrator  
Illinois Department of Human  
Services

**Sara Block, Co-Chair**  
Managing Director of Advocacy  
and Partnerships  
Ascend Justice

**Jenna Lopez**  
Sexual Assault & Legal  
Advocacy  
Program Manager  
YWCA Sauk Valley

**Sen. Sally J. Turner**  
Caucus Whip  
44<sup>th</sup> District  
Illinois Senate

**Jennifer Cacciapaglia**  
Executive Director, Mayor's  
Office of Domestic Violence and  
Community Violence  
Prevention, City of Rockford

**Rep. Tony McCombie\***  
House Republican Leader  
89<sup>th</sup> District  
IL House of Representatives

**Jennifer Vancil**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Quincy Area Network Against  
Domestic Violence

**Wendy Cohen**  
Senior Policy Advisor  
Office of the Illinois Attorney  
General

**Michelle Meyer\***  
Chief Executive Officer  
Mutual Ground

**Amanda L. Vasquez**  
Research Manager  
Research & Analysis Unit  
Center for Victim Studies  
Illinois Criminal Justice  
Information Authority

**Ariana Correa**  
Policy Manager  
Office of the Illinois Lt.  
Governor

**Stacy L. Short**  
Associate Deputy Director  
Child Protection  
Illinois Department of Children  
and Family Services

**Sen. Celina Villanueva**  
Senator, 12<sup>th</sup> District  
Illinois Senate

**Patrick Delfino**  
Director  
Illinois State's Attorney  
Appellate Prosecutor's Office

**Vickie Smith\***  
President and CEO, Illinois  
Coalition Against Domestic  
Violence

**Patrick Windhorst**  
Representative  
Illinois House of  
Representatives

**Jennifer Greene**  
Director of Policy and Advocacy  
Life Span

**Emily Miller**  
Senior Advisor for Policy &  
Legislative Affairs  
Office of the Illinois Governor

**Tom Weitzel**  
Chief of Police, Retired  
Riverside Police Department

**Emily Harwell\***  
Policy Manager, Office of the  
Illinois Lt. Governor

**Amanda Pyron**  
Executive Director  
The Network: Advocating  
Against Domestic Violence

**Rep. Maurice A. West, II**  
Representative, 67<sup>th</sup> District  
Illinois House of  
Representatives

**Meg Hefty**  
Associate Director  
Sarah's Inn

**Jenny Schoenwetter,  
Secretary**  
Executive Director & CEO  
Harbor House

\*Denotes member who served a partial term.

All DVFRC members serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for actual expenses incurred, such as travel and printing. No member requested reimbursement for expenses in 2024.

## **Pioneer Teams**

The DVFRC established five regional review teams in 2024. This first cohort of teams is referred to as the Pioneer Teams.

These teams include:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Madison and Bond counties
- 12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Will County
- 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Winnebago and Boone counties
- 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Lake County
- 21<sup>st</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Kankakee and Iroquois counties

The main responsibilities of the regional review teams are to maintain membership records; create a secure system of maintaining and storing minutes, correspondence and confidential information, and conduct domestic violence fatality or near-fatality case reviews (750 ILCS 62/65 (a)). The Act also notes the creation of a secure system for maintaining information as a regional team responsibility. However, due to its infrastructure and the need to maintain consistency across teams, ICJIA has assumed this responsibility.

## **Partners**

### ***National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI)***

The NDVFRI (<https://ndvfri.org/>) provides the DVFRC and regional review teams with technical assistance as they engage in the domestic violence fatality reviews. One training opportunity that the NDVFRI provided to the DVFRC and the regional review team was a mock domestic violence fatality review. The DVFRC also utilized the NDVFRI as part of the onboarding process for the five pioneer teams.

### ***Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (IVDRS)***

The IVDRS (<https://sites.northwestern.edu/ivdrs/>) is part of the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). The IVDRS provides the DVFR initiative with data related to domestic violence homicides. The initial connection to IVDRS was made through DVFRC members, and then a direct connection was established with any regional teams that were searching for data relevant to their specific judicial circuit. This work is ongoing.

## Operations and Activities

### DVFRC

#### *Meetings*

Throughout the 2024 calendar year, the DVFRC held four meetings. The meetings occurred quarterly, on the third Tuesday of the month from January to November. The first two meetings were hosted by the ICADV via Microsoft Teams, and the final two were hosted by ICJIA via Webex. Each meeting was audio and video recorded. Those recordings are stored at ICJIA. All meetings are public and subject to the Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 120/2 (c) (38)).

Most DVFRC meetings began with a mission moment. The purpose of initiating the meeting with these moments was to remind and center committee members on the significance of the Committee's purpose. In these mission moments, the co-chairs would present recent media reports of Illinois domestic violence fatality reports. When done, DVFRC members would observe a moment of silence to honor the victims and survivors. The members would then discuss what stood out to them about the reports and identify any aspects that they thought the regional review teams should consider as they conducted reviews. During these moments in 2024, members discussed the following cases and corresponding concerns:

- **Adult female:** Even though the victim was reported to be living with the alleged perpetrator, there was a complete lack of reference to domestic violence in media reporting of the homicide.
- **Adult female and a child:** In both cases, the alleged perpetrators had been previously involved with authorities and had had contact with the justice system for domestic violence related incidents. Still, the threat they represented was not fully recognized.
- **Adult female:** The alleged offender had had multiple points of previous justice system involvement.

The mission moments shared a mere sampling of the near-fatalities and fatalities that occurred in Illinois in 2024.

In addition to the mission moments, each meeting included updates from staff and the regional review teams as well as discussion or training on relevant topics. Some of those topics included sections from the Guidebook, the annual and biennial report process, presentations from organizations also involved in domestic violence work, and member reviews of trainings and conferences attended. Each meeting ended with an opportunity for public comment.

The additional agenda items for each of the four meetings were as follows:

- February 20, 2024
  - Member term and on-boarding timeline
  - DVFR Guidebook and Documents

- May 21, 2024
  - Member vacancies and terms
  - Required training reminder
  - Presentation and discussion: “Behavioral Assessment and Threat Management and the Connection between Targeted Violence and Domestic Violence,” presented by Mark Concordia from Advocate Health
  
- August 13, 2024
  - Leadership transition
  - Member vacancies
  - National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative Conference
  - Technical assistance structure
  - Presentation: “Document the Abuse, Changing the Outcomes of Abuse,” presented by Norma Peterson, Executive Director, Document the Abuse
  
- November 19, 2024
  - Project Director Introduction
  - Administrative Updates
  - Required training reminder
  - Potential legislative changes to DVFRA
  - Media request policy
  - DVFR Conference and Interviewing
  - Set 2025 Calendar of Meetings

### ***Training and Technical Assistance***

Throughout 2024, the DVFRC received and provided training and technical assistance to the regional review teams. Committee members were educated on threat assessment and management and on the connection between domestic violence and targeted violence. These specific trainings informed the approaches regional review teams would take when identifying antecedents (red flags) in a particular case review. They also helped to expand the context for individuals reviewing cases in which domestic violence fatalities are thought to occur.

The DVFRC engaged regional review teams in a discussion centered on interviewing victims and survivors, including family members and other stakeholders associated with domestic violence fatalities. A major purpose of the fatality case review is to get as complete a picture as possible about the persons involved – where they came from, what traumas they experienced, and if and how they connected to various systems in Illinois. Discussions also included questions as to whether interviewing family members could cause further trauma and, if so, how teams could avoid causing further harm and still include family in the review process.

In addition, over ten members of the DVFRC and regional review teams attended the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative International Conference in Prescott, Arizona, organized by Dr. Websdale and his team. Co-chair Block, presented on a plenary panel focused on new and emerging teams. The attendees from Illinois participated in plenary sessions on the intersection between fatalities related to domestic violence and mental health. They heard from

both new and established fatality review teams based nationally and internationally. Additionally, the attending members received valuable information relating to the preparation that needs to precede interviews in a case review. Finally, participants were able to hear about initiatives in other parts of the world and the differing approaches taken in their reviews. The conference afforded teams an invaluable opportunity to connect with attendees from different regional review teams in Illinois and to learn from others doing similar work.

Beginning in July 2024, the DVFRC co-chairs and project director provided monthly technical assistance to the five Pioneer Teams as they selected their first cases for review and began the case review process. The teams also received technical assistance on an as-needed basis. Areas of assistance included support for teams as they developed their individual structures and processes and worked to understand confidentiality as defined under the Act. Assistance also included support relevant to interviewing survivors and their families; using the secure storage Microsoft Teams site; practicing self-care during the review process; and understanding trauma-informed perspectives.

### ***Website***

In 2024 the ICJIA maintained and updated the initiative's website (<https://dvfr.illinois.gov/>) to reflect the DVFR's current organizational structure, its most recent and past meeting agendas, minutes, and reports related to the DVFRC's work. The updates completed this year ensured that the public, along with any prospective regional review team members, had accurate information about how the DVFRC is structured and staffed and that they could review the most recent activities of the committee and the regional review teams.

### ***Data Source Analysis***

The DVFRC met with representatives of the IVDRS to discuss the project. The IVDRS is a data source used by the DVFRC for data analysis.

### **Regional Review Teams**

In 2024, the five regional review teams focused on finalizing team membership, on gaining the understanding to conduct domestic violence fatality review, and on preparing for the first reviews. Each of the five regional review teams met regularly. During their initial meetings, the Pioneer Teams all focused on on-boarding. This critical piece of creating a review team included trainings on case reviews and the Guidebook, which has specific resources, templates, and education on the case review process. In addition, on-boarding included participating in a mock case review and getting oriented to trauma-informed processes, team organization, self-care, and other topics. All teams then developed strategies for how their individual team would operate. Additionally, they identified their case selection criteria and reaffirmed prior training on confidentiality and ICJIA's secure Microsoft Teams storage site.

They continued to work on assessing domestic violence fatality and near-fatality cases within their jurisdictions on identifying eligible cases, and on scheduling their first case review. One team has completed its first review. The cases ultimately chosen and/or reviewed in 2024 were

partly based on the following factors: the number of victims during an alleged offender's lifetime, the multiplicity of Illinois systems involved, the complexity of the case, the number of witnesses available to interview, and occurrences of past domestic violence in the alleged offender's family history.

The specific work of each regional review team is detailed below.

### ***3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Madison and Bond counties***

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit team met on the following dates:

- September 4, 2024
- October 1, 2024
- November 4, 2024
- November 18, 2024
- December 3, 2024

The team applied their criteria for case selection and identified several possible cases. After choosing one case (multiple fatalities) they began identifying potential sources of information.

Members collected documents and discussed who would be interviewed, who would conduct the interviews, and how the interview process would be implemented. They sent letters to potential interviewees, describing the initiative and offering them an opportunity to speak about the case. The co-chair conducted two interviews.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit team scheduled their first case review for January 21 and 28, 2025.

During the team's 2024 work, they also received technical assistance from the DVFRC and project director on the following dates:

- August 6, 2024
- September 3, 2024
- October 1, 2024
- October 28, 2024
- November 25, 2024

### ***12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Will County***

The 12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit team met on the following dates:

- July 9, 2024
- July 31, 2024
- November 12, 2024
- December 10, 2024

After considering two cases, the team applied their selection criteria and chose one to review (homicide-suicide). This case will involve a significant number of interviews. Consequently, members focused on developing their interview process. They decided, for instance, that using two people to interview someone would result in the most productive experience.

The team encountered challenges when it came to accessing records located at medical institutions. The Act does not specifically provide exceptions for mental health, substance use, and some other health information/diagnoses. Members alerted the DVFRC to the challenge. ICJIA and the committee are identifying how the relevant statutes could be amended to make this kind of information more accessible.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit team anticipates holding their first case review early in 2025.

During the team's 2024 work, they also received technical assistance from the DVFRC and project director on the following dates:

- July 17, 2024
- August 21, 2024
- September 18, 2024
- October 16, 2024
- November 20, 2024
- December 18, 2024

### ***17th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Winnebago and Boone counties***

The Winnebago and Boone county team met on the following dates:

- July 17, 2024
- September 27, 2024
- December 18, 2024

This team created a case selection committee to review potential cases. After presenting three cases, the committee chose a homicide-suicide case to review. Another committee was formed to focus on information-gathering for the review.

The team decided not to conduct interviews in this case because they were concerned the process might add to the trauma of survivors and other family members. The team decided to address that concern with more education and training so that they can utilize interviews in the second case review.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Circuit team scheduled their first two case reviews. The first will be conducted January 25 and 26, 2025 and the second May 7, 8, and 29, 2025.

During the team's 2024 work, they also received technical assistance from the DVFRC and project director on the following dates:

- July 17, 2024
- August 21, 2024
- September 18, 2024
- November 20, 2024
- December 18, 2024

### ***19th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Lake County***

The 19th Judicial Circuit team met on the following dates in 2024:

- June 23, 2024
- September 30, 2024
- December 11, 2024

After reviewing multiple cases, the team selected one (a homicide) for review. The team focused on dividing responsibilities into three areas: gathering information, developing a chart of possible sources of information, and creating a draft timeline. The team decided to conduct interviews for the upcoming case review.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit team has scheduled their first case review for April 9 and 16, 2025. The team also received technical assistance from the DVFRC and project director on the following dates:

- June 28, 2024
- August 7, 2024
- October 10, 2024
- December 12, 2024

### ***21st Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Kankakee and Iroquois counties***

The 21<sup>st</sup> Judicial Circuit team met on the following dates:

- June 4, 2024
- July 10, 2024
- August 1, 2024
- August 20, 2024
- September 26, 2024

After reviewing multiple cases, the team selected a domestic violence related suicide for review. The team developed a list of source data using the log provided in the Guidebook. Most team members were involved in gathering information related to the case.

The team decided to have two members conduct the interview, one person to ask and respond to questions and a second whose primary responsibility was to take notes during the interview. The team sent letters and then followed up with recipients via phone. They included with the letter a survivor resource document, including frequently asked questions about the process and an explanation of why the case was selected. Additionally, the team created an interview worksheet, which contained the meeting link and the interview questions. The worksheet was sent to the interviewee in advance.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Judicial Circuit team concluded their first case review in December 2024. The team is currently reflecting on the process of their first review, noting lessons learned and exploring how to improve the case review process moving forward.

During the team's 2024 work, they also received technical assistance from the DVFRC and project director on the following dates:

- June 24, 2024
- August 9, 2024
- September 27, 2024
- October 21, 2024
- November 8, 2024
- December 13, 2024

Every two years each regional review team will gather the insights and recommendations from their case reviews and submit to the DVFRC a biennial report summarizing those recommendations.

## **Challenges and Lessons Learned**

### **Regional Team Funding**

A lack of funding support for regional review teams presented significant challenges to the DVFR initiative. In 2024, five regional teams made use of alternative options, such as using interns and agency volunteers and seeking alternative funding for support. The first cohort's funding approaches will be incorporated into the recruitment of the next cohort.

### **Confidentiality: A Barrier to Accessing Records**

Obtaining records during the case review process presented another challenge in 2024. While the Act widely opens the door to team accessibility to confidential records, the DVFRC faced unanticipated challenges in obtaining mental health, AIDS and HIV, and substance use records. ICJIA is meeting with other state agencies and stakeholders to craft language to amend the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Confidentiality, AIDS Confidentiality, and Substance Abuse Disorder acts to ease barriers to record accessibility. This information is important to understanding the experiences of the people involved in the near-fatality or fatality, interactions, or lack thereof with systems, and opportunities to address gaps and risk factors.

## Looking Forward

### DVFR Meetings

The DVFR will continue its cadence of quarterly meetings in 2025. The meetings will be hosted by ICJIA through the Webex platform and will take place on the following dates:

- February 4, 2025
- May 6, 2025
- August 5, 2025
- November 4, 2025

These meetings will continue to include administrative and regional team updates, training opportunities for members, and discussion of the next cohort of regional review teams. Meeting notices, agendas, and minutes can be found on the DVFR website at <https://dvfr.illinois.gov>.

### 2025 Regional Review Team Recruitment

Staff are developing a recruitment plan for the second cohort of regional teams. Initial first-year teams self-identified based on an interest in being a pioneer team. A few regions have expressed interest in being a part of the next cohort. Efforts to begin recruiting new teams are anticipated after all pioneer teams have reviewed their first cases. Lessons learned from their case review processes and outcomes will be incorporated into second cohort of regional review team onboarding.

### Continued Development of the DVFR Guidebook

The DVFR Guidebook is a living document created to educate and support regional review teams through the case review process. It provides information, sample tools, and templates for the different stages of review. In 2025, the project director will continue to add to and amend the Guidebook based on lessons learned through the pioneer teams' first case reviews, which will result in a richer, more nuanced resource. Additionally, as ICJIA and the DVFR work with the legislature to improve access to mental health, substance use, and HIV/AIDS information, we may incorporate into the Guidebook sample procedures, forms, and requests for information that include the statutory language allowing for access.