

# **Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee: 2025 Annual Report**

A report to the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly

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## **Acknowledgments**

The Domestic Violence Fatality Review Ad Hoc Committee (DVFRC) would like to thank the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority staff for their support of this work. Specifically, the DVFRC would like to thank Scott Riolute and Brianna Martin for their legal guidance related to Open Meetings Act procedures, Jacob Derrick for his support in advancing legislation to improve access to domestic violence fatality and near-fatal records, Karen Galbraith and Vincent Sarna for administrative and technical assistance, and Executive Director Delrice Adams for her continued leadership and support of this initiative.

The DVFRC is also grateful for the continued support of Dr. Neil Websdale and his team for providing training to new DVFRC and regional review team members. Additionally, the DVFRC would like to thank its co-chairs, Sara Block and Megan Alderden, for all of their work on this important initiative.

Finally, the DVFRC thanks Kathleen R. Conlon Wasik for presenting domestic violence fatality data from Northwestern University's Illinois Violent Death Reporting System and Vincent Sarna for presenting on the work and recommendations of the State of Illinois' Colton's Domestic Violence Task Force.

## Introduction

This annual report documents the operations and activities of the Illinois Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee (DVFRC) and its regional review teams during calendar year 2025.

### Legislation

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

The DVFRC was created in response to the significant impacts of domestic violence—particularly fatal and near-fatal incidents on individuals, families, and communities across Illinois. Under the Act, the DVFRC, in part, oversees the establishment of regional domestic violence fatality review teams, provides training and technical assistance related to team formation and case review processes, and compiles domestic violence fatality data (750 ILCS 62/20). The DVFRC first convened in January 2022 and continues to meet quarterly to carry out its statutory mandate.

### Domestic Violence Fatalities in the United States and Illinois

Domestic violence-related fatality rates have increased both nationally and in Illinois. Nationally, domestic violence is associated with more than 1,500 deaths and approximately 2 million injuries each year (Huecker et al., 2023). The Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (IVDRS) indicated 358 intimate partner-related homicides<sup>1</sup> or suicides were reported in 2023. The IDVRS collects data from death certificates and coroner, medical examiner, and law enforcement reports. This marked an 84% increase from 2015, when reports totaled 193 intimate partner-related homicides or suicides (IDPH, n.d.). The Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence reported 137 domestic violence-related homicides in 2024 and 120 homicides in 2023 (Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2024). In a recent victim service project conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority's Center for Victim Studies, 70.6% of domestic violence service providers served individuals who had experienced a domestic violence fatality or near-fatal incident in the past year. Overall, these data highlight potential increases in domestic violence-related homicides, underscoring the importance of the DVFRC.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *intimate partner-related homicides* is utilized in this paragraph as it is the term used in the IVDRS.

## **Organizational Structure**

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority's (ICJIA) Ad Hoc Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee leads the fatality review initiative, providing oversight of regional review teams formed across Illinois.

### **Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority**

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 Illinois criminal justice system. The DVFRC is required to employ a full-time program manager to carry out its statutory duties (750 ILCS 62/40(a)(1)). ICJIA fulfills this requirement by staffing a DVFRC project manager. The project director provides administrative support, facilitates the formation of regional review teams, and delivers training and technical assistance to them.

### **Illinois Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee**

The DVFRC is composed of subject matter experts representing the Illinois legislature, law enforcement, social and legal services agencies, and the criminal legal system. It also includes personnel from other agencies and systems that serve or interact with individuals who have experienced domestic violence.

Under the Act, the DVFRC is required to hold meetings at least quarterly and to establish and maintain a [website](#) (750 ILCS 62/40 (a)(1-5)). Members contribute their expertise by supporting the creation of regional review teams, providing training and technical assistance, and helping teams address barriers to accessing case records. The DVFRC is also responsible for developing guidelines and model policies for regional teams, and for submitting annual and biennial reports to the Governor and General Assembly. Biennial reports include policy and system recommendations aimed at reducing domestic violence-related fatalities in Illinois.

### ***DVFRC Funding and Staff***

In State Fiscal Year 2026, ICJIA received a \$350,000 state appropriation to support the DVFRC. These funds support the salary of a full-time DVFRC project director and additional staff, subject to the approval of the DVFRC (750 ILCS 62/40(b)(8)).

### ***Officers***

Ms. Sara Block and Dr. Megan Alderden were elected as DVFRC co-chairs by the voting members in 2022 and were re-elected in February 2025. Jayden Anderson Baker was elected secretary of the DVFRC in February 2025.

### ***Members***

The Act requires DVFRC membership to be diverse in expertise, race, ethnicity, gender, and geography (750 ILCS 62/25– 30). In calendar year 2025, DVFRC membership included the following individuals:

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

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

**Dr. Anastasia Khoubeava**  
Emergency Medicine  
Physician  
Endeavor Health

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

**Carolyn Klarquist**  
Director, Pretrial Fairness  
Office of the State  
Appellate Defender

**Willette Benford**  
Survivor and Senior  
Advisor  
Office of M.K. Pritzker

**Andrew Hires**  
Sheriff  
Richland County Sheriff's  
Office

**Erica Koegler**  
Chief of Bureau of  
Domestic Violence, Sexual  
Assault, and Human  
Trafficking  
Illinois Department of  
Human Services

**Naomi Taylor**  
Director, Rape and Sexual  
Assault Prevention  
Program  
Illinois Department of  
Public Health

**Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Garcia**  
Assistant Deputy Director  
Illinois State Police

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

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

**Patrick Windhorst**  
Representative  
117<sup>th</sup> District  
Illinois House of  
Representatives

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

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

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

**Ariana Correa**  
Policy Manager  
Office of the Illinois  
Lieutenant Governor

**Heather Blanke**  
Child Protection  
Supervisor  
Illinois Department of  
Children and Family  
Services

**Celina Villanueva**

Senator  
12<sup>th</sup> District  
Illinois Senate

**Patrick Delfino**

Assistant Director  
Illinois State's Attorney  
Appellate Prosecutor's  
Office

**Jennifer Welch**

Chief Policy Officer  
Illinois Coalition Against  
Domestic Violence

**Fatimeh Hussien**

Criminal Court Advocate  
Life Span Center for Legal  
Services and Advocacy

**Emily Miller**

Senior Advisor  
Office of the Illinois  
Governor

**Tom Weitzel**

Chief of Police (Retired)  
Riverside Police  
Department

**Shelby Hoffman Binder**

Policy, Advocacy, and  
Research Manager  
The Network

**Maurice A. West, II**

Representative  
67<sup>th</sup> District  
Illinois House of  
Representatives

**Meg Hefty**

Associate Director  
Sarah's Inn

**Jayden Anderson Baker**

Development Director  
Harbor House, Kankakee  
County Coalition Against  
Domestic Violence

**Fawn Pettet**

Client Support Services  
Manager  
Land of Lincoln Legal Aid

**Amirrah Abou-Youssef**

Coordinator  
Family Violence  
Coordinating Council  
12<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

**Sheikera Balentine**

Director of Legal Advocacy  
Violence Prevention  
Center Southwestern  
Illinois

**Dr. Tom Golebiewski**

Adjunct Professor  
Social Work  
Loyola University Chicago

**Alisa Velonis**

Associate Professor  
Community Health  
Services University of  
Illinois Chicago

All DVFRC members serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for expenses incurred, such as travel. No member requested reimbursement for 2025 expenses.

***Regional Review Teams***

Regional review teams are organized by the circuit court boundaries. In 2025, the DVFRC established the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team. The other five regional review teams were part of the first cohort established in 2024.

The DVFRC's six regional teams included:

- 3rd Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Madison County and Bond County (formed in 2024)
- 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Marshall County, Peoria County, Putnam County, Stark County, and Tazewell County (formed in 2025)
- 12th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Will County (formed in 2024)

- 17th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Winnebago County and Boone County (formed in 2024)
- 19th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Lake County (formed in 2024)
- 21st Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team – Kankakee County and Iroquois County (formed in 2024)

Regional review teams maintain membership and meeting records, conduct reviews of domestic violence fatality or near-fatal cases, and prepare and submit annual and biennial reports to the DVFRC (750 ILCS 62/65 (a)). Regional teams are also responsible for creating a secure information system. ICJIA assumed the responsibility to ensure the privacy and security of sensitive and confidential records and maintain consistency across teams. Regional review team members have access to ICJIA's secure platform.

## **Partners**

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

NDVFRI representatives provide the DVFRC and regional review teams with technical assistance as they engage in domestic violence fatality reviews. In 2025, the NDVFRI provided the DVFRC's regional review teams and prospective members of a Cook County regional review team with training on domestic violence fatality and near-fatal review processes, including mock reviews.

### ***Illinois Violent Death Reporting System***

The [IVDRS](#) is part of the National Violent Death Reporting System. Upon request, the IVDRS provides the DVFRC and regional review teams with data related to domestic violence homicides.

## Operations and Activities

### DVFRC

In calendar year 2025, the DVFRC met on the following dates:

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

All meetings included administrative updates and a brief mission moment. Mission moments highlighted current events related to domestic violence fatalities or near-fatal incidents to emphasize the importance of the committee's work. The DVFRC also invited guest speakers to present on domestic violence topics. The speakers presented State of Illinois Domestic Violence Task Force recommendations and Northwestern University's Illinois Violent Death Reporting System domestic violence data.

Training and technical assistance meetings also were conducted regularly to support regional review teams. Co-chairs and ICJIA staff met monthly with each regional review team to provide guidance and technical assistance and to support their case reviews. ICJIA staff also developed training videos to accompany a guidebook, which regional review team members can access through Docebo, ICJIA's learning management system for staff, grantees, and the public.

By the end of 2025, the DVFRC expanded regional review teams by recruiting additional judicial circuits, increased public awareness of the initiative, and supported the formation of new teams.

The DVFRC engaged with seven circuits during the year with the goal of recruiting new teams, including Cook County, 7th (Springfield), 8th (Quincy), 10th (Peoria), 16th (Kane), 18th (DuPage), and 23rd (DeKalb) judicial circuits. The 10th Judicial Circuit team formed in September 2025, and the Cook County Judicial Circuit is planning to form a team in 2026. Team formation began by engaging a strategic partner within the circuit to introduce the DVFRC initiative and connect with prospective members. New members then received guidance on statutory requirements for team composition, including confidentiality agreements, and training on both the fatality review process and the DVFRC secure storage site. The DVFRC also supported each new team in selecting its first case.

The DVFRC's public awareness and education efforts included presentations by ICJIA staff and a DVFRC co-chair to both the Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women and the Illinois Family Violence Coordinating Council Statewide Committee

(IFVCC). The Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women was established to address the disproportionate rates of missing and murdered Black women and girls in Chicago. The Task Force invited the DVFRC to present on the overlap between domestic violence fatalities, near-fatal incidents, and the experiences of missing and murdered women and girls.

DVFRC members met with the IFVCC to encourage participation from judicial circuits not yet represented. The IFVCC is a multidisciplinary forum for collaboration among local victim service programs and criminal justice entities to strengthen community responses to family violence. In the meeting, the DVFRC presented an overview of the domestic violence fatality review process.

In addition, the project director co-presented on DVFRC work and trends in domestic violence fatalities and near-fatal incidents in Illinois to Association of Police Social Services members.

Alongside county-level advocacy efforts, the DVFRC pursued and continues to pursue legislative changes intended to ease regional review team access to records for case reviews. One aim of the proposed legislative changes is to clarify provisions in Illinois' [Substance Use Disorder Act](#) and the [Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Confidentiality Act](#), permitting records sharing and access for DVFRC case review purposes. The proposed changes also aim to extend DVFRC report timelines to allow for additional internal review and revise quorum requirements to require a simple majority.

### **Regional Review Teams**

Regional review teams must complete at least two reviews per year. In calendar year 2025, the five established regional review teams completed 10 case reviews. The six regional review teams cover 12.7% of Illinois' counties, covering 13 of 102 total counties.

#### ***3rd Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team***

The 3rd Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team included 11 members, held 13 meetings (virtually and in person), and conducted two case reviews.

In addition, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit participated in an annual domestic violence memorial event hosted by the Alton Memorial Hospital to commemorate community members who have lost their lives to domestic violence. A team member spoke about the team's ongoing work. Finally, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit examined recent changes to the Illinois Domestic Violence Act to ensure stakeholders in their circuit were properly interpreting the updated legislation.

### ***10th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team***

The 10th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team formed in September and included 34 members. The team held four virtual meetings and prepared for its first in-person fatality review scheduled for April 2026.

To prepare for this review, the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit leadership team attended DVFRC technical assistance meetings, formulated their review teams, selected prospective cases, and elected co-chairs and a secretary. They also onboarded all team members to their corresponding Microsoft Teams secure storage site. The team is planning its first review for the first half of 2026.

### ***12th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team***

The 12th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team included 20 members, held 19 meetings (virtually and in person), and conducted two case reviews.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Circuit team attended training on understanding the pathway to violence, which provided information on precipitating factors for mass shootings. This training helped inform their second domestic violence fatality review, which involved a premeditated murder and a death by suicide. Moreover, the 12<sup>th</sup> Circuit used team-building exercises to foster cross-disciplinary connections within its review team. This allowed them to examine their domestic violence fatality cases from a multidisciplinary lens and ensure that their county is addressing the unique needs of their community.

### ***17th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team***

The 17th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team included 17 members, held nine meetings (virtually and in person), and conducted two case reviews.

The team identified interviews with community members as a method for better understanding lived experiences related to domestic violence. To support this work, the team created an interview subcommittee, which interviewed a local mother who lost her daughter to domestic violence. Insights from this interview helped inform interview processes for future domestic violence fatality review cases. The team also incorporated therapy dogs into fatality review meetings to support team members during the review process.

### ***19th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team***

The 19th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team included 28 members, held eight meetings (virtually and in person), and conducted two case reviews.

The team focused on implementing a clearer team structure, including identifying members responsible for case reviews and establishing defined appointment terms. These changes were intended to support a more equitable and organized approach to the team's work.

### ***21st Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team***

The 21st Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team included 15 members, held 12 meetings (virtually and in person), and conducted two case reviews.

The team used its meetings to discuss opportunities for community engagement, including connecting with the local Department of Children and Family Services and neighboring Iroquois County to better address domestic violence fatalities in their county. The team also discussed developing domestic violence awareness training for individuals working in hotels, motels, and laundromats to identify potential signs of domestic violence and appropriate responses. Implementation is planned for 2026.

## **Conclusion and Future Plans**

In 2025, the DVFRC and its regional review teams conducted 10 case reviews focused on domestic violence fatalities in Illinois. In 2026, the DVFRC and its review teams anticipate completing 14 case reviews.

Looking ahead, the DVFRC plans to continue supporting the work of regional review teams through ongoing training and technical assistance, including providing monthly technical assistance calls; participating in initial case reviews for newly formed teams; and coordinating additional resources and training, as needed. The DVFRC also plans to continue engaging stakeholders in Cook, DeKalb, Kane, and DuPage counties to support the establishment and implementation of review teams in their respective circuits.

Regional review teams will continue reviewing domestic violence fatalities and near-fatal incidents within their circuits to identify policy and system recommendations to strengthen prevention and responses across Illinois. The 10th Judicial Circuit Regional Review Team is on track to review two cases. The Cook County Regional Review Team is also expected to be formed in 2026 and to complete two case reviews. The DVFRC will also continue engaging judicial circuits across Illinois to support the expansion of domestic violence fatality review teams statewide.

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