

REQUEST:

Replication of a coordinated, multidisciplinary community response to target repeat felony domestic violence offenders and strengthen support for victims through grant programs.



Stearns County Domestic Violence Court for Repeat Felony Offenders

**Increasing Victim Safety and Batterer Accountability through an
Intentional, Targeted Response**

A collaborative multidisciplinary model to supervise 40-60 dangerous repeat felony domestic violence offenders with 18-24 months of strict conditions of release, enforced by close judicial supervision, surveillance, weekly offender accountability check-ins directly to the court, and extended legal and supplementary support services to enhance victim safety and autonomy.

What Do We Do?

- Address offenders previously and currently charged with felony-level domestic violence crimes
- Intervene with offenders who continue to violate court orders while charges are pending
- Recognize that children live in most of these repeat offenders' homes
- Remedy traditional probation supervision/court intervention which fails to eliminate the violence

Targeted handling of repeat offenders by a specialized team of domestic violence-trained professionals enhances batterer accountability through timely and intensive supervision. Victim and child safety services are intentionally coordinated. Specialized responses are powerful under the direct authority of a judge to whom offenders report weekly.

Criminal and Civil Justice Systemic Coordination is critical to Offender Accountability & Victim Safety: A speedy, effective, consistent, and coordinated court response to domestic violence for repeat offenders increases the judicial system's ability to protect women and children.

Results of the Program

- Law enforcement reports/response improves; court response increases and more informed decisions are made.
- Prosecutors rely less on victim involvement; resources and technology make a big difference.
- Children witnessing trauma get meaningful intervention; parenting information and insight is improved.
- 24/7 surveillance improves victim safety; expertise in probation provides meaningful interventions/sanctions.
- The Legal Aid attorney provides confidential, accurate information to victims and addresses myriad issues, allowing victims to assess life choices with independence, clarity, and certainty.
- 50% of repeat domestic violence victims who are provided these services have left offenders within one year.

Stearns County's Repeat Felony Domestic Violence Court works

For five years, **Stearns County's Felony Domestic Violence Court** has held repeat felony offenders accountable and increased safety to victims beyond expectations:

- ✓ **Intensive surveillance** results in effective court order enforcement, 24/7, including extensive law enforcement interaction, offender accountability information, and true random testing and whereabouts checks.
- ✓ **Civil Legal Aid Attorney** gives victims options: child support, child custody, orders for protection, housing, consumer credit, disability/health care, and other individual types of legal help.
- ✓ **Specialized probation agent** consistently intervenes to control manipulative offender behaviors by addressing rule violations at weekly court compliance hearings or before by requesting immediate custodial arrest; the agent actively participates in monitoring offenders' treatment and employment or education searches.
- ✓ **Victim Assistance Coordinator in prosecutor's office** increases offender accountability by collecting and coordinating statements, jail phone call recording,s and past and present police reports for evidence-based (verses victim dependent) prosecutions.
- ✓ **Results:** Offenders are convicted. Victims stay in their homes at a higher than expected rate. And – the **criminal justice system response time from charging to conviction has been cut in HALF.**

Probation AND surveillance resources are required – from the commission of the crime until probation or prison.

Probation supervision is exponentially enhanced by trained, informed, 24/7 surveillance officers and the intentional, targeted exchange of information with law enforcement. Court orders regarding no contact with victims, treatment attendance, and chemical use can only be meaningfully enforced (before AND after convictions) with personal, consistent intervention; not surprisingly, offenders act differently – and better – when they know, for certain, they are being watched. Once offenders have experienced life without chemicals, crime, and battering, overall court system involvement drops dramatically. Five years of data proves this.

Community advocates are exponentially more effective with Legal Aid attorney partners.

Law enforcement has experienced how timely, effective, community advocate support increases victim safety. Further, 88 % of repeat domestic violence victims have chosen to receive help with child custody, custody modification, visitation, child support, order for protection requests or modifications, housing and mortgage issues, social security/disability law, health care, and other consumer legal issues through the assigned legal aid attorney. Victims also consult with their own legal aid attorney on the veracity of offender claims of consequences in domestic violence court, and can make their own safety judgments based on independent, verifiable, and accurate information. With practical, legal, and law enforcement protections all enhanced, community shelter use actually **dropped** with implementation of this model, which allows victims and children to be safer in their own homes. Further, 50% of the repeat domestic violence victims served have now chosen to leave their abusers for good.

Information coordination ensures judges use their power to protect victims and their children.

Judges require current, accurate, meaningful information to exercise power and control over repeat domestic violence offenders. Resources include surveillance, early and intensive supervision, input from legal aid attorneys and trained staff to collect evidence for prosecutions. The judge's orders are actually enforced, enabling the criminal justice system to hold offenders accountable while keeping victims safe. The coordination of criminal, civil, practical, and long-term consistent interventions has reduced offender recidivism and increased victim safety beyond experienced expectations.

Replication of this model makes sense. The doubling of domestic violence homicides in 2013 demands we do something more - something different - something that works - in Minnesota.

The traditional criminal justice system response to domestic violence simply doesn't work. Domestic violence homicides in Minnesota are climbing exponentially. Stearns County puts the existing muscle in Minnesota law -- the Domestic Abuse No Contact Order laws already in place – to work! This model should be replicated in other county criminal justice systems by providing the seed money to incent actual system improvement – now, before more women and children die. Probation, surveillance, Legal Aid, and evidence collection resources are needed immediately in systems willing to try something different that's proven to work – here and now – to reduce crime and protect lives.