



# Domestic Violence Courts

## Improving the Justice System's Response to Domestic Violence

Report to Governor  
C.L. "Butch" Otter  
and the 1st Regular  
Session of the 63rd  
Idaho Legislature

Idaho domestic violence courts are characterized by a judge specially trained in domestic violence; dedicated on-site staff; and a coordinated community response between the justice system and community stakeholders. This dedicated court ensures that offenders are carefully monitored, victims have access to comprehensive services and judges have the information they need to make prompt and effective decisions. Each component of Idaho's domestic violence courts is designed to promote victim safety and hold offender accountable.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURTS OPERATIONAL IN SIX JUDICIAL DISTRICTS

Currently, Idaho has 9 active domestic violence courts. Domestic violence courts hold offenders accountable and increase victim safety by conducting judicial review hearings and connecting victims with advocacy and other services early in the process. Idaho's domestic violence courts monitored over 1,500 offenders in FY2014. Domestic violence court coordinators assisted over 1,250 victims navigate the court system in both criminal and civil cases.

*"Accountability of offenders in Domestic Violence Court is astonishing. They look at each review hearing as a time they can solve any problems or have any questions answered in a timely manner. Criminal no-contact orders are handled without having another court date set out which in most cases aggravates the situation and sometimes finds the offenders violating them before it's lifted. When we tell the offenders that their court date is coming up and they should have something complete before then, most of the time, it gets completed. It's lightened my number of official probation violations filed by attending to the situation right in court."*

~~ Domestic Violence Court  
Probation Officer

### IDAHO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURTS EXPEDITE CASE PROCESSING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES

Domestic violence courts are associated with beneficial changes within the court system, including victim safety and satisfaction, offender accountability, and more efficient case-flow processing. Domestic violence courts have been successful in decreasing the time between arrest and the resolution of a criminal misdemeanor domestic violence case. There are several advantages to this accelerated case processing: offenders are sentenced to treatment faster; victims receive early access to advocacy support and services; offenders are monitored earlier in the process; and the courts become more efficient. Ultimately, the combination of swift prosecution, treatment, and supervision is a positive outcome and goes a long way toward meeting the goal of community safety.



Resolution of domestic violence cases is **30 DAYS faster** when processed in Idaho's domestic violence courts, as compared with the traditional court process.

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### **What Domestic Violence Court Offenders shared about their experiences . . .**

- *I feel like a better person to both (my partner and children). My relationship with my family has never been this strong. There is communications and more honesty.*
- *I am working full-time. I get plenty of exercise, I sleep better, and the relationships I have with family members has improved significantly.*

### **DESIGNATED MENTOR COURT HOSTS NATIONAL SITE VISIT**

Ada County Domestic Violence Court was designated as a Mentor Court by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women in 2013. In June 2014, Ada County hosted a national site visit with the Center for Court Innovation, the other two Mentor Court sites from Texas and New York, and newly established domestic violence courts from Guam, Oklahoma, Iowa, California, Missouri, Colorado, and Minnesota. Ada County Domestic Violence Court served as a role model for these visiting courts and staff shared their expertise related to best practices, procedures, relevant programming, and building overall capacity to respond effectively to these difficult cases.

### **SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT FUNDS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT OFFENDERS**

Research indicates that while substance abuse does not cause domestic violence, there is a correlation between the two issues. The issues of domestic violence and substance abuse can interact with and intensify each other and should be treated simultaneously.<sup>1</sup> The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare allocated \$429,000 in FY2014 for substance use disorder treatment for individuals in domestic violence courts. In FY2014, these funds reached nearly 15% of domestic violence offenders (over 210 individuals) and were fully committed within the first seven months of the fiscal year. This level of utilization clearly demonstrates the high need for services and the willingness of courts and offenders to access treatment, when available. Due to limited resources, the Supreme Court has developed a management plan to effectively target high risk domestic violence offenders. These are the individuals who are unlikely to successfully complete probation or other court requirements without such treatment and continued court involvement. High risk offenders are also likely to benefit the most from treatment, and targeting these specific cases may stretch the available funds throughout the entire fiscal year.

### **EDUCATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT TEAMS, STAKEHOLDERS, AND THE COMMUNITY**

Throughout the year, domestic violence courts hosted community trainings in multiple counties. The trainings focused on harm reduction risk management, stalking, non-fatal strangulation, risk assessment and coordinated community response. Over 550 community based professionals attended these free domestic violence trainings including judges, court personnel, attorneys, law enforcement, probation officers, advocates, treatment providers and many more.

In May 2014, the Supreme Court hosted a statewide domestic violence court conference. Over 140 domestic violence court team members from around the State of Idaho were in attendance, including judges, court clerks, prosecutors, public defenders, victim advocates/coordinators, probation officers, law enforcement and court coordinators. This highly collaborative conference included presentations from speakers all over the country on topics such as domestic violence offender intervention programs; critical issues for working with immigrant and limited English proficient survivors; sexual assault, sex trafficking, and prostitution; and improving access for underserved populations.

### **EXPANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT BEST PRACTICES THROUGHOUT IDAHO**

As domestic violence courts expand throughout Idaho and promote best practices in effectively handling these difficult civil and criminal cases, more rural counties are incorporating these practices. Rural county judges, who have integrated review hearings in their criminal domestic violence cases, have reported an increase in compliance with treatment and less probation and no-contact order violations. The expansion and enhancement of domestic violence court practices throughout the state is invigorating and improving the civil and criminal justice systems response to domestic violence.

<sup>1</sup> Fazzone, Patricia Anne, et al. "Substance Abuse Treatment and Domestic Violence: Treatment Improvement Protocol." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.