



Oklahoma Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board

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Introduction

The purpose of the Oklahoma Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board¹ is to reduce the number of domestic violence related deaths by identifying gaps in the domestic violence prevention and protection system and proposing recommendations aimed at improving the coordinated response of the individuals, organizations, and agencies that comprise the domestic violence prevention and protection systems in Oklahoma.

This annual report is prepared in compliance with 22 O.S. §1601, which mandates the DVFRB to submit an annual statistical report on the previous year's domestic violence fatality trends in Oklahoma, as well as a set of policy recommendations on how to improve the state's domestic violence protection and prevention system. The recommendations are drawn from discussions of the cases the Board reviewed in the leadup to this publication.

Domestic Violence Statistical Findings for 2022

The DVFRB and Program Staff annually identify, review, and report on domestic violence-related fatalities that occurred in Oklahoma during the previous calendar year. A fatality is classified as domestic violence-related if it falls into one of the following broad categories: intimate partner homicide (IPH), family homicide, triangle homicide, bystander/good Samaritan, and roommates. The table below outlines the most recent domestic violence-related fatality totals DVFRB staff compiled for the 2022 calendar year. (See Table)

The 2022 total of domestic violence-related homicide victims marks four consecutive years where the DVFRB has identified more than 100 victims who were killed

Table 1: Focus Group Interview Themes

Variables	2022 Total
Homicide Cases	92
Murder-Suicide Victims	26
Domestic Violence Homicide Victims (All Categories)	105
Intimate Partner Homicide Victims	42
Child Victims (<18)	17

due to domestic violence in our state. DVFRB research shows that Oklahoma has averaged 114 domestic violence homicide victims between 2019 – 2022. In contrast, the average between 2011 – 2018 was 90. The average number of intimate partner homicide victims has remained generally consistent between 2011 – 2022, with an average of 40 victims being killed every year by their intimate partners. The majority (332; 69.2%) of IPH victims were women, while their killers were almost exclusively men. This aligns with national research placing Oklahoma as second in the nation for women being murdered by men in single victim/single offender incidents when analyzing 2020 homicide data². Further analysis of state rankings shows Oklahoma has consistently ranked in the top 10 of states of women being murdered by men since 1996³.

The average number of victims being killed by family members has also increased over the last four years. The state averaged about 52 victims killed by family members during 2019 – 2022. This is a 33.3% increase from the average of 39 between 2011 – 2018. In addition, the number of victims killed in domestic

violence-related murder-suicides in 2022 (26) marks four consecutive years where more than 20 victims were killed in this type of incident. Crime data submitted to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI) by law enforcement agencies in Oklahoma has shown that domestic abuse crimes have been on an upward trend since 2011. Finally, protective order filings in Oklahoma have consistently risen between 2016 – 2022, with the most recent filing total in 2022 being 6.1% higher when compared to 2021.

2023 DVFRB Recommendations

In 2023, DVFRB case reviews and discussions predominantly revolved around: 1) the need for the state to play a more prominent role in funding domestic violence and sexual assault victim services; 2) the need to strengthen domestic violence laws prosecutors rely on to hold abusers accountable; 3) the need for domestic violence related training for 9-1-1 telecommunicators. The recommendations are summarized below, but more detailed explanations on their rationale can be found in the recommendations section of this report.

Recommendation One

In response to increasing domestic violence and sexual assault (DV/SA) crime rates in Oklahoma and decreasing federal funding geared towards assisting DV/SA victims in our communities, the Oklahoma Legislature should take appropriate legislative action to increase the funds allocated to Oklahoma Attorney General (OAG) certified DV/SA programs to \$16.1 million. This allocation would strengthen and ensure the provision of direct services to victims being served by OAG-certified DV/SA service providers.

Recommendation Two

The Oklahoma legislature should take appropriate legislative action to strengthen several areas in the Oklahoma statutes so that prosecutors across the state are better equipped to hold domestic abusers accountable in court. This will help enhance the safety of victims, their families, and the community at large. The recommended statutory changes are briefly outlined below and further explained in the rationale section of this recommendation:

1. Amend 21 O.S. §644 so that Oklahoma prosecutors are not limited to being able to file Domestic Assault & Battery (A&B) with a Deadly Weapon charge only if there was a firearm present. This would eliminate the discrepancy between Domestic A&B with a Deadly Weapon and its non-DV counterpart, which can be filed if an offender committed a crime by means of any deadly weapon, such as a firearm or knife, or any other means likely to produce death.
2. Amend 21 O.S. §13.1 so that it includes domestic violence crimes outlined in 21 O.S. 644 as 85% crimes.
3. Amend 21 O.S. §644 to increase the range of punishment for first time Domestic Assault & Battery by Strangulation. A broader range, such as 1 – 10 years, would allow appropriate sentencing based on the severity and facts of an individual incident.
4. Amend 57 O.S. §571 so that Domestic

Assault and Battery Subsequent Offense and Domestic Assault and Battery on a Pregnant Person are statutorily considered violent crimes in the State of Oklahoma.

Recommendation Three

In light of the recent passage of the Haiden Fleming Memorial Act, which mandates new 9-1-1 telecommunicators in Oklahoma hired after January 1, 2024 to complete at least 40 hours of training on basic call handling and dispatch services within six months of their hiring date and other annual training requirements, the Oklahoma 9-1-1 Management Authority should take appropriate action to include courses in their training program that teach domestic violence (DV) related education and best-practices when answering domestic violence-related emergency calls placed by DV victims, family members, and/or their children. This should be done to ensure an effective trauma-informed response to those being impacted by domestic violence and calling 9-1-1 for help as well as to safeguard law enforcement personnel being dispatched to these calls for service.

Conclusion

This 22nd edition of the DVFRB report showcases the bleak domestic violence outlook facing Oklahoma. The statistics show domestic violence-related deaths and crimes have consistently increased over the last decade. A significant amount of work is needed to ensure those who are currently being victimized have access to resources and that abusers are being held accountable. Steps must also be taken to try to prevent the cycle of abuse before it begins. The recommendations in this re-

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port provide an actionable roadmap for agency stakeholders and Oklahoma state lawmakers about how to address serious issues negatively affecting the Oklahoma domestic violence protection and prevention system. Our hope is that this report will encourage and guide Oklahoma's legislature, systems, agencies, organizations, communities, and citizens to continue developing and implementing best practices and policies that strengthen our state's comprehensive and coordinated response to those who continue suffering from the effects of domestic violence. ■

References

Referred to interchangeably as the DVFRB or the Review Board.

When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2020 Homicide Data. Published September 2022, by the *Violence Policy Center*. Source: <https://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2022.pdf>

When Men Murder Women: A Review of 25 Years of Female Homicide Victimization in the United States. Published October 2023, by the *Violence Policy Center*. Source: <https://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2023.pdf>