



# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW COMMISSION 2025 Report

Statistical Report,  
Recommendations and Trends

Office of the Attorney General and Council on Domestic Violence  
Issued: January 20, 2026

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# Introduction

All the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission's (the Commission) past reports, including this report, are publicly available on the Attorney General's Office's website: <https://ago.vermont.gov/reports/>.

This report contains 2024 statistical data and recommendations and trends that the Commission has discussed over the past year.

## Acknowledgment

The Commission wishes to thank Emily Scott, Public Health Analyst for the Vermont Department of Health, for providing us with statistical analysis and charts for this report. The Commission is grateful to the Health Department for their partnership!

## Background

The Vermont Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission was created by statute in 2002. The purpose of the Commission is to collect data and conduct in-depth reviews of domestic violence -related fatalities to better understand how the fatalities occurred and what can be done to prevent them in the future.

Under [15 V.S.A. § 1140](#), the Commission was established with the following purposes:

- (1) to examine the trends and patterns of domestic violence-related fatalities in Vermont;
- (2) to identify barriers to safety, the strengths and weaknesses in communities, and systemic responses to domestic violence;
- (3) to educate the public, service providers, and policymakers about domestic violence fatalities and strategies for intervention and prevention; and
- (4) to recommend policies, practices, and services that will encourage collaboration and reduce fatalities due to domestic violence.

Commission proceedings and meetings are confidential by statute. The Commission reports its findings and recommendations to the Governor, the General Assembly, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence.

The recommendations in this report are based on case reviews conducted by the Commission and analysis of the related data. The Commission reviews Vermont Department of Health data provided by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) and law enforcement records for all homicides and select fatalities to determine if they are domestic violence related. Of these, the Commission selects a few cases to review in depth. The Commission draws conclusions from these reviews and makes recommendations like those contained in this report.

# List of Commission Members

Section 1140(b) of Title 15 Vermont Statues Annotated states that the Commission shall be established within the Office of the Attorney General, in consultation with the Council on Domestic Violence, and shall have 23 members appointed from agencies specified in the statute.

The 2025 members are as follows:

Name	Position	Organization
Dr. Tania Bertsch	Physician	UVMMC (Retired)
Amy Farr	Victim Services Director	Vermont State Police
Shawn Burke	Chief	Burlington Police Dept.
Melissa Deas	Representative	Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs
Jennifer Firpo	Law Enforcement Certification and Training Coordinator	Vermont Police Academy
Emily Fredette	Injury and Violence Prevention Program Manager	Vermont Department of Health
Carolyn Hanson	Assistant Attorney General	Office of the Attorney General
Jennifer Harlow	Sheriff	Orleans County
Kelsey Rice	Survivor	
Heather Holter	Co-Director	Vermont Council on Domestic Violence
Kerrie Johnson	Public Defender	Office of the Defender General
Dr. Kelley Klein	Medical Director	Department of Mental Health
Gary Marvel	Deputy Director of Field Services	Department of Corrections
Dr. Kathleen McCubbin	Deputy Medical Examiner	Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Megan Kinlock	Grants Manager	Center for Crime Victim Services
Lurcia Missakila	Advocacy Program Manager	H.O.P.E. Works
Meredith Pelkey	Director of Victim Services	Vermont Department of Corrections
Meghan Place	Victim Advocate	Windsor County State's Attorney's Office
Sarah Robinson	Co-Director	Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
Julie Ryley	Domestic Violence Unit Director	Vermont Department for Children and Families
Hon. Kirstin Schoonover	Superior Court Judge	Vermont Judiciary
Michelle Donnelly	State's Attorney	Washington County
John-Paul Schmidt	Captain	Vermont State Police

# What is the Commission's definition of a domestic violence-related fatality?

The data on domestic violence homicides on which the Commission reports includes only those cases that the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has ruled as a homicide or cases charged as a homicide. It does not include suicides and other deaths that may be related to a domestic violence incident. However, the Commission is empowered to review in-depth any domestic violence-related fatality, and the Commission uses the following criteria to make that determination:

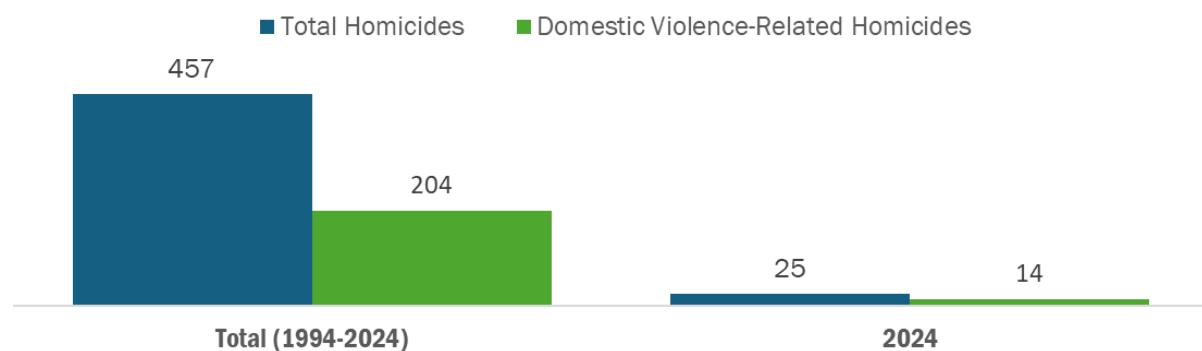
- the responsible party was related to the victim as a “family member” according to the “plain and commonly accepted meaning” of the term;
- the responsible party and the victim were related as “household members” as defined under the Abuse Prevention Act at [15 V.S.A. § 1101\(2\)](#);
- the responsible party killed an estranged partner’s current household member;
- the responsible party killed a current partner’s estranged household member;
- the responsible party killed a family member’s current or estranged household member;
- the responsible party killed a bystander(s) while attempting to harm family or household members;
- the responsible party is a law enforcement officer forced to kill in the line of duty when responding to a domestic violence incident;
- a law enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty when responding to a domestic violence incident;
- the fatality is domestic violence-related but is ruled a justifiable homicide;
- the fatality is a murder-suicide matter involving family or household members;
- the fatality is a suicide with a documented history of domestic violence to include victim suicide, responsible party suicide as a violent act in front of family or household members, responsible party suicide by law enforcement, and teen suicide; and
- the fatality is a substance use-related death (chronic use, suicide, overdose) that is related to domestic violence.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE DATA

The Domestic Violence Fatality Commission determined that there were **25 homicide deaths in Vermont in 2024**. For the definition that the Commission uses to determine if a homicide is domestic violence-related, please see the previous section on “What is the Commission’s definition of a domestic violence-related fatality?” Of the 25 homicide deaths determined by the Commission, 15 involved a firearm (60%). The Commission determined that **14 of the 25 deaths were related to domestic violence** (Figure 1). Nine of those 14 domestic violence-related homicides involved a firearm (64%).

Nearly half of all homicides in Vermont between 1994 and 2024 have been related to domestic violence. There have been a total of 457 homicides in Vermont since 1994 (Figure 1). Of those, 204 were determined to be domestic violence-related (45%).

Figure 1. Comparison of Total Homicides and Domestic Violence-Related Homicides



Over time, the percentage of homicides that are domestic violence-related has varied from a high of 71% in 1994 to a low of 10% in 2002 (Figure 2). **In 2024, 56% of all homicides were determined to be domestic-violence related.** When compared to the previous year, **this is more than a two-fold increase in the proportion of domestic violence-related homicides.**

The number of domestic violence-related homicides has varied from a high of 14 in 2024 to a low of one in 2002 (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Percent of All Homicides that are Domestic Violence-Related, 1994-2024

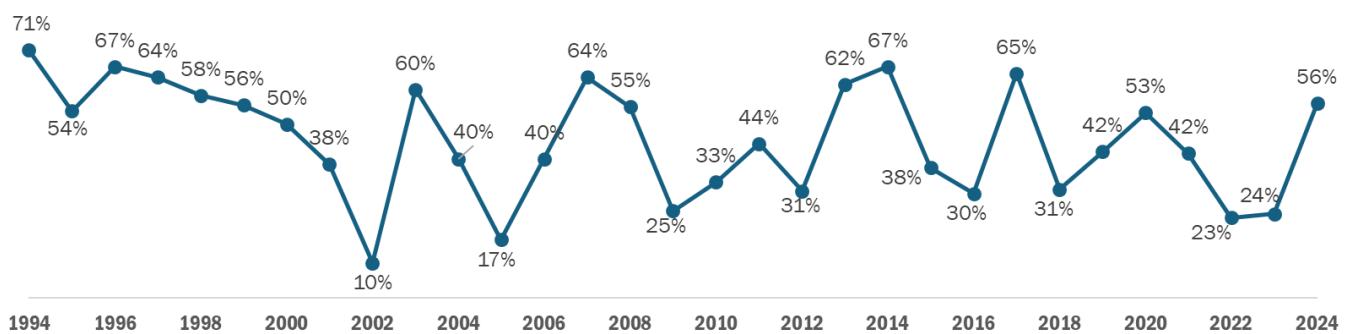
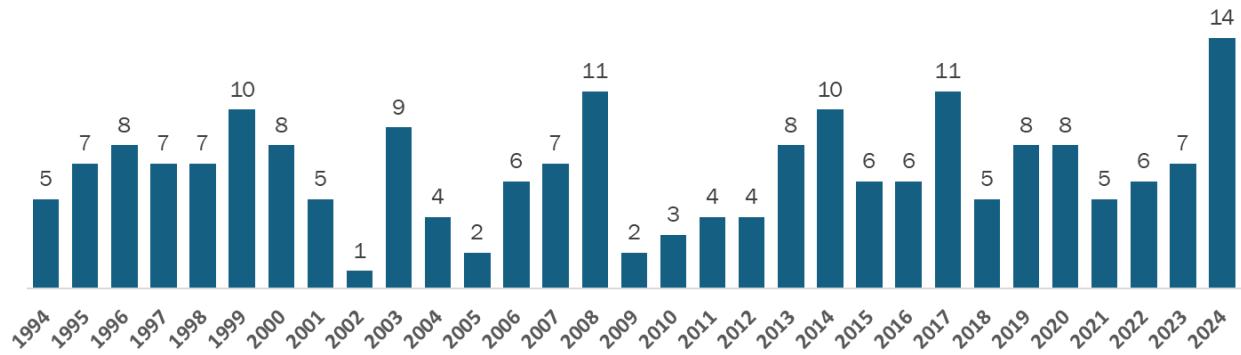


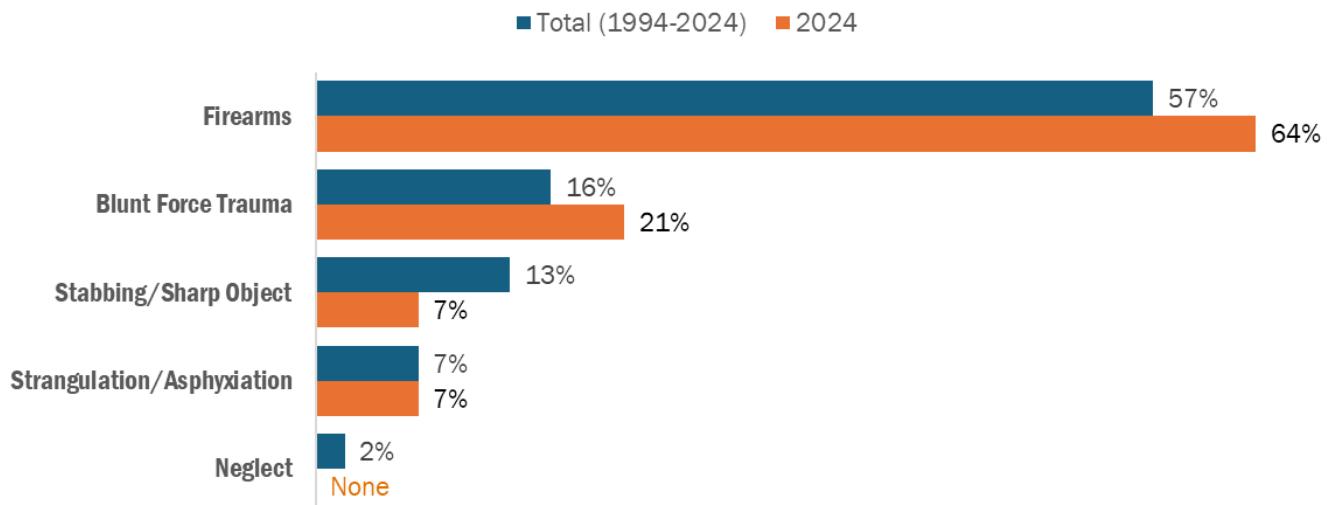
Figure 3. Number of Homicides that are Domestic Violence-Related, 1994-2004



#### Causes of Death

Of the 14 domestic violence-related homicides in 2024, nine involved death by firearm (64%), three involved blunt force trauma (21%), one involved stabbing (7%), and one involved strangulation (7%, Figure 4). **Since 1994, firearm injury has been the leading cause of domestic violence-related homicides, attributed to more than half of such incidents** (57%, Figure 4). The next leading causes have been blunt force trauma (16%), stabbing (13%), strangulation (7%), and neglect (2%). Other causes have occurred in one percent or fewer of domestic violence-related homicides.

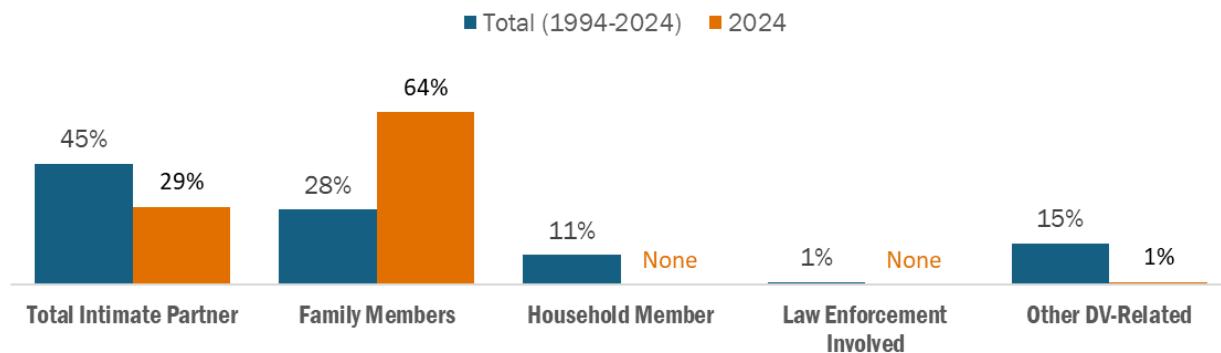
Figure 4. Causes of Death in Domestic Violence-Related Homicides



#### Relationship Between Decedent and Responsible Party

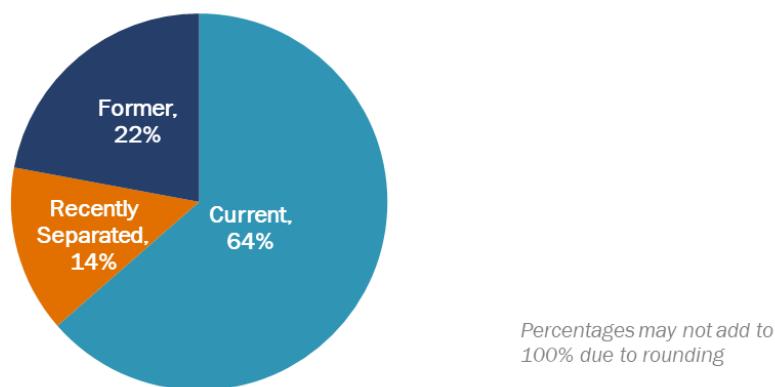
In 2024, nine domestic violence-related homicides involved family members (64%, Figure 5), four involved intimate partners, and one fell under other domestic violence-related (i.e., did not fall under any of the other categories). Since 1994, almost half of all domestic violence-related homicides involved intimate partner relationships (45%, Figure 5), whether it was a current, recently separated, or former intimate partner. Over one-fourth of cases involved family members (28%), while around one in nine involved household members (11%).

Figure 5. Relationship between Decedent and Responsible Party in Domestic Violence-Related Homicides



In 2024, three current intimate partners and one former intimate partner were the responsible parties in the four intimate partner-related domestic violence homicides. Since 1994, around two-thirds of intimate partner responsible parties have been current partners (64%, Figure 6). Nearly one-quarter have been former intimate partners (22%), and around one in seven have been recently-separated intimate partners (14%).

Figure 6. Type of Intimate Partner in Domestic Violence-Related Homicides, 1994-2024



#### Background of Decedents

For 2024 domestic violence-related homicides, decedents ranged in age from 13 to 88 years old (Table 1). Since approximately 2013,<sup>1</sup> decedent ages have ranged from one month to 93 years. In 2024, ten of the decedents were male and four were female. Since 1994, there has been an almost equal proportion of male and female decedents (51% and 49%, respectively). In 2024, all fourteen decedents were White and non-Hispanic. Since 2017,<sup>2</sup> 58 decedents were White and non-Hispanic (91%); four were Black (6%); one Asian (2%); and one Hispanic (2%).

<sup>1</sup> Age ranges for decedents have been collected since 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Race for decedents and responsible party has only been collected since 2017.

### Background of Responsible Parties<sup>3</sup>

In 2024, 11 parties were responsible for the 14 domestic violence-related homicides; the ages of the responsible parties ranged from 17 to 91 years old (Table 1). This age range represents the youngest responsible party and the oldest responsible party since Vermont began collecting this data;<sup>4</sup> therefore, the cumulative age range for responsible parties is 17 to 91 years. In 2024, 10 out of the 11 responsible parties were male and one was female. Since 1994, around four in five responsible parties have been male (81%), while almost one in five were female (18%). In 2024, nine responsible parties were White and two were Black. Since 2017, 51 responsible parties were White and non-Hispanic (85%); eight were Black (13%); and one was Asian (2%).

	Decedent Demographics		Responsible Party Demographics	
	Total (** - 2024)	2024	Total (** - 2024)	2024
<b>Age Range</b>	1 month - 93 years	13 - 88 years	17 - 91 years	17 - 91 years
<b>Sex Assigned at Birth</b>				
Male	104	10	160	10
Female	100	4	36	1
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White	58	14	51	9
Black	4	0	8	2
Asian	1	0	1	0
Hispanic	1	0	0	0

Table 1. Comparison of demographics for decedents and responsible party.

*\*\*Some demographics have not been consistently collected over the years. Age range: collected since 2013 and 2018 for decedents and responsible parties, respectively. Gender: collected since 1994 for both groups. Race/ethnicity: collected since 2017 for both groups.*

*Demographics have not been included for cases where law enforcement is the responsible party. In situations where a responsible party is responsible for more than one domestic violence homicide, they are captured in the data only once.*

### Counties/Location

In 2024, there were three domestic violence-related homicides in Washington County, three in Rutland, two in Caledonia, and one each in Addison, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, Orleans, and Windham, respectively (Table 2). Since 1994, Rutland and Chittenden counties have had the highest percentages of domestic violence-related homicides (17% and 16%, respectively).

<sup>3</sup> Demographics have not been included for cases where law enforcement is the responsible party. In situations where a responsible party is responsible for more than one domestic violence homicide, they are captured in the data only once.

<sup>4</sup> Age ranges for responsible parties have been collected since 2018.

Vermont County	Population, 2024 <sup>†</sup>	Percentage of Vermont's Population, 2024	Percent of Total Domestic Violence Homicides, 1994-2024	Number of Domestic Violence Homicides, 2024
Addison	38,047	6%	6%	1
Bennington	37,039	6%	4%	0
Caledonia	30,535	5%	8%	2
Chittenden	170,851	26%	16%	0
Essex	6,037	1%	2%	0
Franklin	51,066	8%	5%	1
Grand Isle	7,528	1%	2%	1
Lamoille	26,248	4%	5%	1
Orange	30,050	5%	5%	0
Orleans	27,726	4%	6%	1
Rutland	60,198	9%	17%	3
Washington	59,844	9%	9%	3
Windham	45,627	7%	7%	1
Windsor	57,697	9%	8%	0

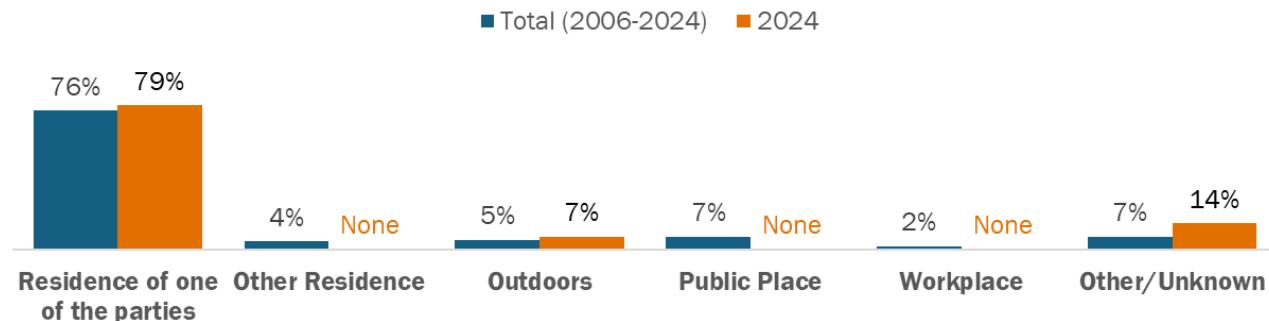
Table 2. Domestic violence-related homicides by Vermont county.

<sup>†</sup>County population estimates as of August 1st, 2025. Retrieved from Vermont Vital Statistics: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/stats/vital-records-population-data/vermont-population-estimates>

In 2024, 11 of the 14 domestic violence-related homicides occurred at the residence of the decedent and/or responsible party (79%, Figure 7). Residence can include area directly outside of the residence (e.g., driveway of the residence). One homicide occurred in an outdoor location (e.g., road, forest/woods), and two homicides fell under the other/unknown category (e.g., location that doesn't fall into one of the categories, including unknown locations). Since 2006,<sup>5</sup> around three-quarters of domestic violence-related homicides have occurred at a party's residence (76%). From 2006 to 2024, 7% of domestic violence-related homicides occurred at a public place (e.g., areas such as commercial stores, public parks), 5% have occurred at an outdoor location, and 4% have occurred at another residence (i.e., incident took place at a residence but not the decedent's or responsible party's residence). Since 2006, there have been nine cases (7%) where location of incident does not fall under one of the established categories, including when the location is unknown. Very few domestic violence-related homicides have occurred at a workplace (2%).

<sup>5</sup> Place of incident has been recorded since approximately 2006.

Figure 7. Place of Incident in Domestic Violence-Related Homicides



#### Child Witnessing

In 2024, there were six domestic violence-related homicides where a child was present or witnessed the incident. Since 1994, at least 45 domestic violence-related homicides have involved children being present at the scene.<sup>6</sup> In 2024, 1,410 children received services from the 15 member organizations of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.<sup>7</sup> Children are among the most vulnerable as victims and witnesses to domestic and sexual violence, and are at higher risk for suicide, substance misuse, and becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence.<sup>8</sup>

#### Alcohol/Substance Involvement

Alcohol or other substances, such as illicit drugs, prescription drugs, or cannabis, were involved in five of the 14 domestic violence-related homicides in 2024 (36%). Alcohol or other substances are considered involved if either the decedent or responsible party are found with these substances in their system through toxicology testing at the time of autopsy or if there is credible and reliable evidence of alcohol/substance use gathered by police during the investigation. Since this data started being tracked in 2017, alcohol or other substances have been involved in 29 domestic violence -related homicides (45%).

#### Murder-Suicide

Two separate domestic violence-related homicides involved murder-suicide out of the 14 domestic violence-related homicides in 2024 (14%). Since 1994, there have been 40 domestic violence-related murder-suicides and an additional three incidents involving domestic violence-related murder and attempted suicide. Since 1994, there have been at least 14 suicides that were related to domestic violence. There was no evidence of suicides directly related to domestic violence occurring in 2024, apart from the two murder -suicides.

#### Relief From Abuse Orders

There was no current Relief from Abuse order (RFA) nor Relief from Abuse order on Behalf of a Minor (RFAOBO) in effect for any domestic violence-related homicides in 2024. Since 1994, the data show that among domestic violence-related homicides, current RFAs were in effect for six incidents (3%), and former RFAs between the parties involved existed in two incidents (1.5%).

Overall, in 2024, there were 3,200 petitions filed for RFAs and 406 petitions filed for RFAOBOS in

<sup>6</sup> It is unclear from the data if children present has been collected consistently since 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Vermont Network. 2024 Data Snapshot. [VTN Data Snapshot 2024 Pg1 \(vtnetwork.org\)](http://vtnetwork.org).

<sup>8</sup> Wolfe, D.A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel, D. and Gough, R. (1995). "Strategies to Address Violence in the Lives of High-Risk Youth." In Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women, New York, NY: Sage Publications.

Vermont. A total of 2,310 temporary orders (2,131 RFAs and 179 RFAOBOS) and 1,112 final orders (1,043 RFAs and 69 RFAOBOS) were granted.

Vermont County	RFAs			RFAOBOS		
	Petitions Filed	Temporary Orders Granted*	Final Orders Granted†	Petitions Filed	Temporary Orders Granted*	Final Orders Granted†
Addison	141	98 (70%)	61 (62%)	23	8 (35%)	1 (13%)
Bennington	248	145 (58%)	56 (39%)	28	8 (29%)	2 (25%)
Caledonia	157	109 (69%)	63 (58%)	22	8 (36%)	2 (25%)
Chittenden	631	457 (72%)	198 (40%)	64	33 (52%)	11 (10%)
Essex	28	18 (64%)	17 (94%)	8	6 (75%)	3 (50%)
Franklin	318	197 (62%)	103 (52%)	55	23 (42%)	14 (61%)
Grand Isle	36	20 (56%)	12 (60%)	5	3 (60%)	1 (33%)
Lamoille	156	79 (51%)	54 (68%)	19	9 (47%)	0 (0%)
Orange	129	103 (80%)	52 (50%)	25	23 (92%)	8 (35%)
Orleans	154	99 (64%)	53 (54%)	29	9 (31%)	1 (11%)
Rutland	440	307 (70%)	143 (47%)	36	13 (36%)	6 (46%)
Washington	332	204 (61%)	90 (44%)	46	10 (22%)	8 (80%)
Windham	212	141 (67%)	73 (52%)	24	9 (38%)	6 (67%)
Windsor	218	154 (71%)	68 (44%)	22	17 (77%)	6 (35%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3200</b>	<b>2,131</b>	<b>1,043</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>69</b>

Table 3. Relief from Abuse orders (RFAs) and Relief from Abuse orders Filed on Behalf of a Minor (RFAOBOS) filed and granted for 2024 by Vermont county.

\*Percentages reflect temporary orders granted of the total filed. Because multiple temporary orders may be granted based on a single petition (e.g., extending a temporary order), these percentages can exceed 100%.

†Percentages reflect final orders granted of the total temporary orders granted.

Note: This data includes all temporary or final orders issued within the responsive time period. It may not reflect orders for the petitions that were filed during the same time period. Each order is counted separately within these totals.

### Firearms Information

Since 2023, the Commission receives data about firearms and domestic violence from the Vermont Intelligence Center as part of their Gun Violence Project.<sup>9</sup> The first table (below) captures the number

<sup>9</sup> This data is derived from the Vermont Intelligence Center's (VIC) Gun Violence Monitoring Project (GVMP). The VIC monitors Vermont law enforcement's primary Records Management System (RMS), Valcour, using established criteria to collect data on gun violence within the State of Vermont. At the time of this report, we do not have the ability to review the state's other RMS system for the following agencies: Norwich Police Department, Windsor Police Department, Royalton Police Department and Hartford Police Department. Analysts classify qualifying reports into the following categories. Cases in which a firearm is used to wound another person are classified as "Gunshot Wounds Reported," or "Firearm Homicide" based on lethality. Cases in which a firearm is fired with no reported injuries are classified as "Witnessed Gunfire Incident," and incidents in which a firearm is present to illicit fear are classified as "Threat with a Firearm." Firearm violence refers to these four categories and firearm offenses that do not fit into this categorization are not included in this report. Officer-involved shootings, suicides, cases of self-defense, recreational firearm use, and cases involving non-powder firearms are also omitted from this dataset. In this report, "incident" refers to a law enforcement response to a specific event while "victim" refers to the number of people who sustained firearm injury; as some incidents involve multiple victims, the total number of victims will often exceed that of the total number of incidents. This project's methodology relies on observational

of reported gun violence incidents in 2024 and, of those, how many were related to domestic violence.

2024 Firearm Incidents		
Total Incidents of Gun Violence	Total Incidents of Gun Violence Related to Domestic Violence	Percentage of Total Related to Domestic Violence
376	83	22%

The second table (below) captures how many times a gun purchase from a licensed firearms dealer in Vermont was attempted by a prohibited person and denied using the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) and the number of those in which the denial was based on the attempted purchaser having either a criminal conviction for misdemeanor domestic violence or an active RFA order.

2024 Vermont NICS Denials		
Total Denials	Total Denials Related to Domestic Violence	Percentage of Total Related to Domestic Violence
150	3	2%

## Recommendations

The Commission makes recommendations to the Governor, General Assembly, Chief Justice, and the Council on Domestic Violence based on information gathered during the case review process. We typically review one or two cases per year in depth. Cases selected for in-depth review may have occurred in any year and must be closed cases. We strive to hear directly from witnesses. We may group cases together that have similarities. Our focus is to find common threads and base our recommendations on those threads.

### **1. Lethality Assessment**

In past reports, the Commission has strongly advocated for the use of a statewide lethality assessment protocol (LAP). Vermont State Police (VSP) require all troopers to conduct LAP screening as part of every domestic violence incident report. Some local law enforcement agencies are using a LAP tool, but not consistently. It is critical that the State find a way to resource and support law enforcement to do this vital work in partnership with advocates. As noted in the data section of our report, nine of the 14 domestic violence-related homicides in 2024 involved firearms.

Vermont agencies that are currently using a LAP tool are using the Maryland LAP. Maryland LAP is converting to a subscription-based model in 2026 and will no longer support the version that Vermont agencies such as the VSP are currently using. The Commission formed an ad hoc committee to learn about the upcoming changes to the Maryland LAP and to explore other similar tools. The committee was comprised of representatives from the Criminal Justice Training Council, VSP, the Vermont Network, Voices Against Violence (a Vermont Network member program), and the Vermont Attorney General's Office. The committee enlisted the help of Domestic Violence Resource for Increasing Safety and Connection (DV RISC), a national resource center led by the Center for Justice Innovation. DV RISC brings deep understanding of lethality assessment tools used

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documentation; discrepancies may exist, and the data should not be considered comprehensive. Assessment of incidents of firearm violence is multi-faceted, and the VIC is continuously working to improve reporting.

throughout the country and provides free technical assistance. They connected our committee with representatives from Maryland LAP; Ontario Domestic Violence Risk Assessment, used in Maine; the Arizona Intimate Partner Risk Assessment Tool, used in Arizona; and the Danger Assessment for Law Enforcement (DA-LE), used by San Antonio, TX, and Cleveland, OH. All the models are very similar and are based on the same research. DV RISC also offers implementation assistance and can fund initial training for communities who wish to implement a tool.

After having the opportunity to meet with representatives from all the programs, the committee selected DA-LE as the tool that would best meet Vermont's needs. Like the Maryland LAP, DA-LE focuses on connecting survivors with resources and helping survivors to appreciate their level of risk. DA-LE offers an increased level of support to ensure that the tool is being used correctly in the field. Developed in 2015, DA-LE is a more recent tool and is designed to be more sensitive than the Maryland LAP by screening in only cases with the most serious risk of lethality. It is validated for use even if there is no probable cause for an arrest. After review, the committee believes changes to the interface for the Maryland LAP will not work with the Valcour system that Vermont law enforcement agencies currently use. The committee is also concerned about Maryland LAP's reliance on an electronic platform given that most agencies in Vermont do not have access to iPads and iPhones, and internet connection can be spotty in rural areas.

The committee presented its findings to the domestic violence mandatory training committee of the Vermont Criminal Justice Council. The Commission believes that committee is best suited to recommend to the Criminal Justice Council which tool to implement and to work with DV RISC to make training available to law enforcement agencies. Once a tool is selected, technical assistance providers will train interested law enforcement agencies and victim service providers who will then pilot the tool in their communities. If the pilot is successful, all law enforcement agencies will be trained to implement it and receive ongoing support.

The Commission is not advocating for the Legislature to specify which tool law enforcement should adopt because these tools may change over time, but **a properly funded statewide mandate for law enforcement agencies to use LAP is necessary to ensure that all police departments commit to the standardized use of a LAP tool.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- That the Legislature provide appropriate resources and funding necessary for training and ongoing support for statewide use of a lethality assessment (LAP) tool as part of law enforcement's response to every domestic violence incident.
- That the Vermont Criminal Justice Council (Council) determine which LAP tool will best meet the needs of law enforcement and develop a protocol for its use by January 1, 2027, which must be adopted by all law enforcement agencies by July 1, 2027.
- That the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence assists the Council and local law enforcement agencies in identifying community advocacy organizations in each county that are willing to provide advocacy services when conducting a lethality assessment.

#### **2. Address Compliance with Firearms Surrender**

In last year's report, the Commission recommended that the Legislature appoint a six-month study committee, known as the Firearms Surrender Compliance Working Group (Working Group), to recommend legislative changes to enhance compliance with firearm surrender orders. Firearm

injury has been the leading cause of domestic violence-related homicides in Vermont. The Commission was pleased that the Legislature adopted this recommendation in Act 64 (2025), § 24. The Working Group began meeting in July 2025 and [produced a report](#) with recommendations that was filed with the Legislature on November 15, 2025.

Vermont courts can order temporary firearms surrender in cases of domestic violence through a Relief From Abuse Order (RFA). The courts can also order firearms surrender through an Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) when a person poses an extreme risk to themselves or to others. In both cases, the relief is available at the temporary order stage if the threshold of required evidence is met. However, compliance with the order is currently based on the honor system. There is no system to check compliance with surrender orders. Improving compliance relies on a collaborative process; it cannot be done by solely by one entity and be effective.

The Working Group made recommendations designed to focus on a collaborative process to promote compliance. Some of the Working Group's recommendations focus on enhancing communication with litigants to better understand their obligations and to increase information sharing. The Working Group also recommends the creation of two law enforcement positions to focus solely on compliance and at least two sheriff departments have expressed interest if adequately funded. The Commission believes that these recommendations are important steps to reducing lethality. The Working Group also recommended changes to 20 V.S.A. § 2307 to improve out-of-home storage options through federal firearms licensees (FFLs). These FFLs are, generally, local gun retailers who can help law enforcement agencies that lack storage capacity for non-evidentiary firearms, as well as providing alternative but equally safe storage for individuals who do not want their firearms held by a police agency.

#### **Recommendations:**

- That the Commissioner of Public Safety, as recommended by the Working Group, direct the Law Enforcement Advisory Board to create a safe, clear and fair firearms surrender protocol, and that the Legislature require all law enforcement agencies to adopt the protocol within six months of issuance.
- That the Judiciary follow the recommendations of the Working Group report to improve communication with litigants about firearms surrender and adopt a compliance form to be used by defendants to report how their firearms are being stored.
- That the Legislature amend 20 V.S.A. § 2307 to clarify that police agencies can store non-evidentiary firearms with FFLs, to improve communication with defendants and FFLs and to encourage the participation of FFLs in the storage program, as outlined in the Working Group report.
- That the Legislature appropriate funding for two law enforcement positions to conduct compliance checks when firearms surrender has been ordered by the Court as recommended by the Working Group.

### **3. Victim Service Positions for Local Police Departments**

For the past two years, the Commission has advocated for victim service positions to assist local police departments. The Commission routinely hears from surviving family members that the most helpful and necessary support they received in the aftermath of a loved one's death was the support

provided by the Victim Services Unit at the Vermont State Police. Conversely, the Commission has heard from family members of homicide victims in cases handled by local law enforcement about the many difficulties they experienced in navigating systems in the aftermath of the crime and the additional trauma they experienced as a result.

To provide much-needed victim services to survivors and families, the Commission strongly recommends **the creation of two victim services positions to assist local law enforcement agencies in the aftermath of a homicide.**

**Recommendation:**

- That the Legislature fund two regional victim service positions that work with municipal agencies to ensure immediate and ongoing victim support in every domestic violence homicide/near homicide and murder-suicide.

**4. Domestic/Dating Violence Prevention Education**

In the Commission's 2016 report, we first noted the need to include dating and domestic violence prevention as part of the health curriculum in schools. Under 16 V.S.A. § 131, the Legislature defines comprehensive health education to include content on recognizing and preventing sexual abuse and sexual violence. While this definition appropriately emphasizes "promoting healthy and respectful relationships," it does not explicitly include domestic or dating violence. Given the strong correlations between sexual and domestic violence, and the evidence that both are preventable through early education and skill-building, it is necessary to strengthen this statute to explicitly address these issues.

Comprehensive health education is critical to the primary prevention of domestic and sexual violence. It equips children with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make informed choices, build healthy relationships, and prevent violence before it occurs. Children who have witnessed violence are at greater risk for either perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life. The Commission has often heard testimony from family members that their loved one lacked insight into what a healthy relationship looks like. A truly comprehensive approach must include education from a very young age, from kindergarten through high school, and address the full spectrum of health and safety topics, emphasizing consent, respect, communication, conflict resolution, and bystander intervention to build skills that prevent sexual, domestic, and dating violence.

A 2020 policy-surveillance study found that 38 states had at least one law addressing teen dating violence (TDV) in secondary schools, and in all those 38 states, the law included provisions for prevention education.<sup>10</sup> Vermont has an opportunity to align with these best practices by **requiring the creation and implementation of a multi-layered dating and domestic violence prevention policy to be implemented across all public schools.** Effective prevention in schools extends beyond classroom education. It requires a coordinated approach that includes staff training, supportive policies, youth leadership, caregiver and community engagement, and a positive school climate.

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<sup>10</sup> Adhia A, Kray M, Bowen D, Kernic MA, Miller E. Assessment of Variation in US State Laws Addressing the Prevention of and Response to Teen Dating Violence in Secondary Schools. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2022 Aug 1;176(8):797-803. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.1735. Erratum in: *JAMA Pediatr.* 2022 Sep 1;176(9):948. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.2555. PMID: 35696154; PMCID: PMC9194746.

**Recommendations:**

- That the Legislature amend 16 V.S.A. § 131 to include a specific mandate for domestic and dating violence prevention education and associated prevention policy.
- That the Agency of Education, in consultation with the Vermont Network, create curriculum guidance for schools and ensure that the Superintendent of each school district includes domestic and dating violence prevention as part of health education in all primary and secondary schools.

**5. Mandatory Judicial Training**

As the Commission first reported in 2023, Vermont does not require judges to complete domestic violence-related training. For many years, the Judiciary has sent new judges to a judicial training program offered by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. The Judiciary also contracted with a former Vermont judge to provide domestic violence training for judges. These trainings are voluntary. There is no required level of training in the dynamics of domestic violence before a judge begins hearing cases. Nor is there any collaboration with domestic violence advocates on the components of the training or any opportunity to provide feedback on the existing training. Several other states, like New York and Maryland, have enacted statutes to ensure that new and existing judges who hear domestic violence-related cases receive regular training in the dynamics of domestic violence.

**To ensure that all judges receive the needed training to understand domestic violence, the Legislature should set minimum hourly requirements and competencies for new and existing judges.** To ensure that the training reflects best practices with domestic violence survivors, the Judiciary should consult with the Vermont Network on training topics and consider including the lived experience of survivors as some entities like the Department of Corrections have done in their trainings. Training records of attendance should be available to the public on the Judiciary's website to promote transparency and increase public confidence that judges understand the dynamics of domestic violence.

It is critical that the **training requirements also include court staff**. Their interaction with a survivor is very important in ensuring public confidence in our court system. Moreover, court staff often provide a crucial first point of contact for survivors who have decided to pursue an RFA order. Those who need emergency relief outside of normal court hours are connected with a member of court staff to assist them in preparing the paperwork for the order. It is critical that these staff members understand trauma and adhere to best practices for communicating with plaintiffs who need emergency assistance.

**Recommendations:**

- That the Judiciary be statutorily mandated to attend domestic violence-related training. The Commission recommends that new judges be required to complete at least 40 hours of domestic violence-related training before hearing cases and that existing judges be required to complete at least 10 hours of domestic violence-related training every two years. That court staff are required to attend at least three hours of domestic violence-related training every year.
- That the Judiciary share information about the content of domestic violence-related training that it offers to judges and staff with other stakeholders. The Judiciary should seek input and feedback from other stakeholders, including the Vermont Network on the content and topics for domestic violence-related training.

- That training topics and attendance records from each training be available publicly.

## **6. Assistance Locating Trained Providers**

The Commission has heard from many survivors about the importance of mental health services for victims and survivors of domestic violence and for people who cause harm to their intimate partners. It is essential that mental health providers in Vermont be well versed in the resources available to their clients as well as having access to training and tools to support their own practice. There is currently no guidance available in Vermont on how to locate a provider who has received training in the dynamics of domestic violence.

The Council on Domestic Violence certifies all Domestic Violence Accountability Programs (DVAPs) for those who have caused harm. Some of those participants may choose to engage in individual therapy as well. With help from a qualified mental health therapist, individual therapy can enhance the safety and well-being for survivors of domestic violence and their children. One-on-one counseling allows people who cause harm to address their own trauma and experiences that may have led them to develop abusive values. The Commission believes that **the Council is best suited to help create guidance on how to locate a mental health provider and how to determine if the provider has the requisite experience necessary to offer help.**

### **Recommendation:**

- That the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence create a planning group charged with crafting recommendations and an implementation plan for training, certification, and other supports to increase the expertise of mental health providers working with survivors of intimate partner violence and people who cause harm to intimate partners.

## **7. Improving Communication with Survivors on Victim's Compensation**

The Commission has heard from many families about the important role Victim's Compensation has played in assisting them with crime-related expenses in the immediate aftermath of the crime, as well as providing support for ongoing medical expenses and counselling. These are critical services that the Commission is very pleased that Vermont offers. We have heard from survivors that in some cases they have experienced some difficulty in accessing these resources.

In some cases, the survivor lost contact with the Victim Compensation professionals working on their case. Paperwork needs to be filed to support a claim and that process can be overwhelming when someone is experiencing trauma. In some cases, survivors with critical ongoing needs have had their cases closed for lack of contact.

The Commission believes that it would be valuable to **increase administrative support for survivors and victims when pursuing services and assistance from Victim's Compensation.**

### **Recommendations:**

- That the Victim Compensation Board add a request for applicants to provide a proxy on the initial claim form for compensation so there is someone the Victim Services Specialist can correspond with in addition to the victim if questions arise or when additional documentation is needed.
- That the Victim Compensation Board add the name of the Victim Advocate, if the survivor is

working with one, to the claim and a space to grant permission to discuss the case.

- That the Victim Compensation Board add an explanation to the form about the need to obtain additional releases and the need to demonstrate that expenses are connected to the crime, and streamline this process as much as possible to avoid delay in reimbursement.
- That in serious cases, the Victim Compensation Program offer an in-person meeting to the survivor to assist in the process.

## Trends and Updates Impacting Domestic Violence

### **1. Option to Impose Accountability Programming in a Final Order**

In last year's report, the Commission recommended that the Legislature amend [15 V.S.A. § 1103](#) to give courts explicit authority to impose a condition that a respondent engage in domestic violence accountability programming when a final RFA is granted. The Commission was very pleased that the Legislature made this amendment to permit courts to impose that condition. As we noted, many survivors advocate for programming to help their partner change behavior as part of the order to help prevent further abuse.

Court forms now offer this option to plaintiffs, and all domestic violence accountability programs accept referrals from a final RFA order. The Legislature amended 15 V.S.A. § 1140(h) to include a request that the Commission report on the number of defendants ordered to complete the program and the number who completed it under this provision.

**Since the law took effect on July 1, 2025, nine defendants have been ordered to complete a DVAP program as part of a final RFA.** These nine orders were entered in five different counties: Caledonia, Windsor, Chittenden, Grand Isle, and Orange. The Commission is pleased to see that the referrals have been widespread geographically, as a result of the efforts of the Council, to ensure that advocates are familiar with the new law.

Of the nine defendants ordered to complete DVAP as part of an RFA, one has completed the intake process and is enrolled in programming. According to the Council on Domestic Violence which supports and certifies DVAP programs according to statewide standards, there have been no program completions as yet, since programs typically take 6-12 months to complete. The Council on Domestic Violence will continue to work with the Judiciary to ensure that defendants receive timely and clear information about how to request an intake with a certified DVAP.

### **2. Confidential Help for Those Causing Harm**

As discussed in our report last year, the Commission is very pleased that Vermont now offers free confidential support services for those causing harm, called [The Spark](#). Originally offered only in the Northeast Kingdom by the Network program Umbrella, the warm line became available statewide in 2025. Staff report that The Spark receives approximately two calls per month, and they expect the numbers to grow both as more people become familiar with this relatively new service and as a result of the increased call service area.

As part of the expansion, The Spark purchased a 1-800 number to ensure accessibility to all potential callers and has been featured by news outlets around the state, including Vermont Public. It continues to offer a free, confidential, safe space for people who may cause or have caused harm to their loved ones. Responders undergo intensive and ongoing training to support callers as they

process thoughts and emotions, identify behaviors they are ready to change, and build skills for safer relationships. This professional service is available from 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM every day. The line serves as a much-needed companion for other services like DVAPs, Restorative Justice, Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs). The Spark also partners with programs offered by Department for Children and Families and Department of Corrections. In addition to extending outreach to community partners statewide, The Spark now offers a bi-monthly newsletter, providing information and resources to educate and support partners who work with populations of people who have caused harm in their intimate relationships.

### **3. Domestic Violence and Firearms Technical Assistance Project (FTAP)**

In 2019, Vermont was selected as one of the FTAP sites, and the only statewide site, to be part of a Violence Against Women Act grant to examine how to better address the intersection between domestic violence and firearms using existing law. A multi-disciplinary workgroup that includes representatives from the Judiciary, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Department for Children and Families, the Vermont Network, the Center for Crime Victim Services, the Department of Corrections, and the Attorney General's Office meets regularly every two weeks.

Over the past year, the group has done case reviews on firearm-related issues in domestic violence cases. Federal grant funding provided for five workgroup members to travel to an all-sites meeting in September in Ohio to learn about the work of other FTAP projects around the country. The FTAP workgroup provided support to the Firearms Surrender Compliance Working Group by creating a guide for defendants on firearms surrender that is currently under review by the Family Oversight Committee. The workgroup has also conducted court watch to see how firearms surrender is working in practice.

The initial grant was for three years with the option for a non-competitive extension of another two years. However, the current federal administration has not yet offered the extension. Federal funding for the project ended July 1, 2025. Vermont was able to get a no-cost extension to continue funding until November 30, 2025. We are hopeful that the federal government will extend funding for an additional two years in early 2026 so that this work may continue.

### **4. Domestic Violence Accountability Programming**

There are 12 Domestic Violence Accountability Programs (DVAPs) around the state that are certified by the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence as operating in alignment with statewide standards. Information about the programs can be found on the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence's [website](#).

Vermont's DVAPs provide programming options for people who have caused harm to an intimate partner and want to change the way they behave in their relationships. Programs offer participants the opportunity to examine the harm they have committed, take accountability for their behaviors, and learn new tools to use as they change how they interact in their intimate relationships. Programs use a variety of nationally recognized curricula, including the Duluth Model, Achieving Change through Values Based Behavior, Emerge, Circles of Peace, the trauma-informed Journey to Legacy curriculum, Parenting with Respect, and Caring Dads. The Circles of Peace Program offers a statewide DVAP for youth and young adults who have caused harm in an intimate partner relationship called the Circles of Peace-Youth program.

A statewide "aftercare" program offers monthly meetings for anyone who has completed a domestic violence accountability program anywhere in the state.

A statewide LGBTQIA+ inclusive program will begin offering services in early 2026.

The Council on Domestic Violence continues to identify and address language access needs, including identifying interpretation and translation services, working with systems partners, and ensuring placement in a DVAP for individuals for whom English is a second language.

The Council was pleased to collaborate with the Department of Corrections and the Department for Children and Families on the drafting of a Universal Referral Form, which will increase the consistency of information relayed to DVAPs. Receiving consistent information from all referral sources will aid in data collection in collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

In FY 2025, DVAPs saw a modest increase in the number of individuals served to 545 people. This is a 12% increase over 485 in FY 2024. As noted in last year's report there were 344 participants in FY 2022 and 416 in FY 2023, so the number of participants has been steadily increasing over time.

## **5. Updates to the Commission-Enabling Statute**

As the Commission requested in its 2023 Report, the Legislature updated the enabling statute for the Commission. The statute had not been updated since 2009. As recommended, the Legislature amended [15 VSA § 1140](#) to include a sheriff with experience and interest in combating domestic violence appointed by the Sheriffs' Association, a restorative justice practitioner from a community justice center, the Director of Victim Services from the Vermont State Police appointed by the Department of Public Safety, a State's Attorney Victim Advocate appointed by the Center for Crime Victim Services, and the Director of Victim Services for Corrections appointed by the Department of Corrections. All of these appointments have been made, and the new appointees have begun serving on the Commission. The Commission invited the Office of Racial Justice to do a presentation for the Commission and has created a collaborative relationship to work closely with that office. The Commission currently has 23 appointed members as outlined under the List of Commission Members on page 3 of this report.

## **6. Supervised Visitation Centers**

The Commission is concerned about the lack of supervised visitation centers in Vermont. These supervised visitation programs and safe exchange locations are necessary resources for many families, especially those impacted by domestic violence. Many domestic violence cases require supervision when contact occurs to maintain safety for the child/ren and the survivor parent. To provide this, supervised visitation programs must have adequate staffing, undergo specialized training and have facilities with safety features. Family members and other community members may be willing to provide supervision but are generally not trained to do this safely and impartially and may place themselves at risk of violence by doing so. Currently Vermont has six independent visitation centers which are not enough to meet existing needs. All have waiting lists and, in some cases, families must travel long distances to have access to these services. Several large areas in the central part of the state, including Lamoille, Orange, Washington, Rutland, and Windsor counties, have no supervised visitation centers. Vermont must address this need to provide safe parental contact for children and caregivers.

## **7. After-Hours Calls to the Judiciary**

Beginning in July 2025, the Judiciary began tracking the number of after-hours calls for emergency relief received by staff. There are currently 23 court staff members and two contractors who respond to after-hours calls statewide. After-hours assistance is available for emergency petitions for RFAs and ERPOs, and since July 2025, Sexual Assault Protection orders. A very large percentage of the calls since the Judiciary began tracking this information have been for RFA requests:

Month	Call total	Number that resulted in RFA petition	Percent of total
July	302	185	61%
August	337	188	55%
September	289	170	58%
October	239	135	56%
November	337	189	56%

The availability of after-hours emergency assistance is critically important to those experiencing domestic violence and the Commission is grateful to the Judiciary for providing this service.

## Conclusion

The 2025 legislative session represented valuable collaboration between the Commission and the Legislature, making meaningful progress on several of the Commission's previous recommendations. While much work remains—on firearms surrender compliance, the expansion of victim's services, and the adoption of Lethality Assessment Protocols by all Vermont law enforcement agencies, to name a few—the Commission is heartened by Vermont's continued dedication to addressing domestic violence and looks forward to further progress in the coming years.

# Resources

There are resources available for people experiencing domestic violence. The Vermont Network has a statewide hotline for domestic abuse that can be reached at 800-228-7395. The Network's fifteen member programs provide services to survivors in all fourteen counties in Vermont. For an interactive map to help you locate a local program near you, visit <https://vtnetwork.org/get-help/>.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline has a safety planning tip sheet that can be found here: <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/safety-planning-around-guns-and-firearms> or call 800-799-SAFE (7233) to get help.

Vermont has DVAPs for people who have caused harm to an intimate partner. These programs are certified by the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence and people do not have to be court ordered to participate—they can self-refer and participate in programming free of charge. Courts may now order a defendant to complete programming as part of an RFA. <https://www.vtdvcouncil.org/find-a-dvap>.

If you or someone you know is concerned about causing harm to an intimate partner, there is free confidential help available 24/7 from The Spark, a violence prevention warmline at <https://www.thesparkvt.org/>.

For a list of firearm storage locations in Vermont, please visit <https://vsp.vermont.gov/firearmstorage#:~:text=The%20court%20can%20require%20the.the%20irears%20with%20a%20FFL>.

For a list of places in Vermont offering free gun locks please visit <https://www.justice.gov/usao-vt/gunsafe-vt>.