

Colorado Domestic Violence
Fatality Review Board

**Annual
Report**

2024

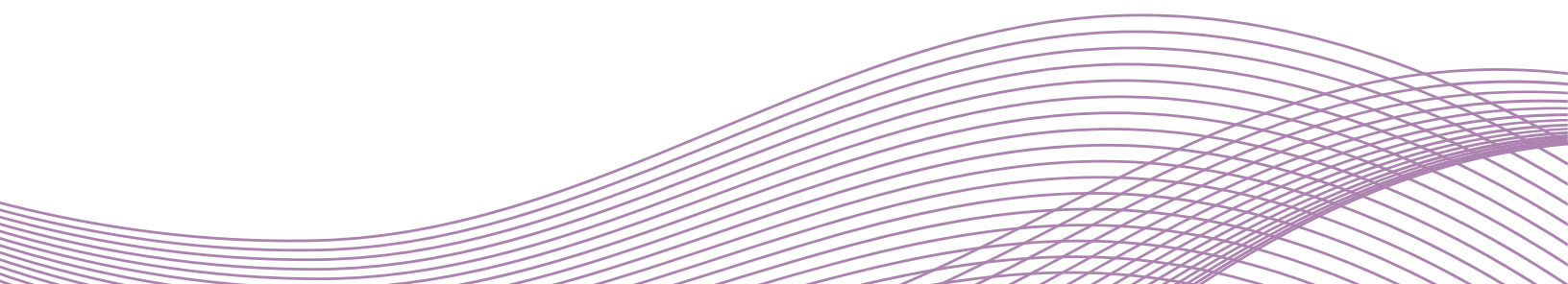
Colorado Office of the Attorney General

Ralph L. Carr Judicial Center
1300 Broadway
Denver, CO 80203



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In Memoriam

This report is dedicated to the 30 current or former intimate partners and seven other victims who died in the context of domestic violence in Colorado in 2023. Their stories serve as a sobering reminder of the urgent need to address and prevent domestic violence. Their memory fuels our determination to advocate for change and provide unwavering support to those who are at risk. Let us honor their lives by diligently working to create a safer and more compassionate society for all.

**Suany Melgar
Almendarez (41)**

Karol Bedoya (45)

**Tommie
Bowman (28)**

Tara Cathcart (39)

Laila Combes (19)

Angela Craig (43)

**Nancy
Macarenas (48)**

Macy Machetta (20)

Katherine Peters (42)

Celeste Hendry (31)

Pavitra Rana (70)

Sachely Diaz (20)

Oliveah Fransua (14)

Alfred Garcia (57)

**Adonais
Gallegos (27)**

**Christine
Goodson (51)**

Colin Grice (57)

**Lourdes
Rodriguez (45)**

Lucille Ruibal (70)

Joslyn Teetzel (29)

**Anna Marie
Trabold (58)**

Tu Thein (58)

Shayna Johnson (44)

Khitam Jumaah (33)

Kristil Krug (43)

Tracy Lee Lechner (42)

Stephanie Long (36)

Lily Silva- Lopez (15)

Talay Salazar (49)

Payshas Whatley (20)

Collateral Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

Liam Brueche (5)

Steven Craig (60)

Ellie Wentz (9)

Ruth Maclaren (35)

Melanie Massay (21)

David Trujillo (52)

Aden Wentz (7)

List of Acronyms

The following list includes acronyms used throughout this report.

CDVFRB or Board	Colorado Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board
CCRT	Coordinated Community Response Team
CBI	Colorado Bureau of Investigation
DOL	Department of Law
DMDVFRT	Denver Metro Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team
DV	Domestic Violence
DVF	Domestic Violence Fatality
DVFRT	Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team
ERPO	Extreme Risk Protection Order
IPH	Intimate Partner Homicide
LAP	Lethality Assessment Program
PPO	Permanent Protection Order
TERPO	Temporary Emergency Protection Order
TRO	Temporary Restraining Order

Language Considerations

Several labels are used for abuse that occurs in the context of a current or former romantic/intimate relationship, including domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and intimate partner abuse. Given that most legal entities, such as the police and courts, use the term “domestic violence” and the legislature uses the term “Domestic Violence Fatality Review,” this report primarily uses the term domestic violence (DV) instead of “intimate partner violence” or “intimate partner abuse.”

Similarly, “intimate partner homicide” or “IPH” is a term often used in research on DV fatalities, but the term is used more commonly in research focused on homicides among current or former romantic/intimate couples and is less likely to address collateral fatalities and suicides. For this reason, this report primarily uses the term “Domestic Violence Fatalities” or “DVF.”

The term “victim” is used throughout this report to refer to a member of an intimate partner couple killed in the context of DV and to those who survived these situations. Because this report focuses on DVFs and the term “victim” is typically used in the criminal and legal context, it fits best within the mandate of the Colorado Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board (Board). However, the Board recognizes the term “survivor” speaks to the sense of empowerment with which many of those experiencing non-fatal DV identify, and we acknowledge the important journey towards the recovery of all impacted by DV.

Message from Attorney General Phil Weiser

It is with a mix of deep sadness and hope for action that the Department of Law publishes this year's Colorado Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board Annual Report. In collaboration with this office, the Board has steadfastly produced annual reports to acknowledge the tragic incidents of domestic violence fatalities in Colorado over the past five years.

This year, the number of reported domestic violence fatalities decreased. This figure, however, does not necessarily suggest that incidents of domestic violence are decreasing; rather, we are well aware that domestic violence continues to be a significant challenge in every community in Colorado. During this past year, Colorado lost mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, and neighbors in 15 of the 64 counties across the state. I encourage you to review the section of the report where the family and friends of victims shared pictures and quotes celebrating the impact these individuals had on their communities. We must center these voices and stories as we work together to each play our part in preventing domestic violence.

The Board has made important progress this year. Notably, the Board was able to report on new data sets including perpetrators' criminal histories, the intersection with domestic relations cases, and the number of cases with a history of protection orders. This new data helps us better understand risk factors and shape recommendations. In this year's report, the Board recommends investing in new, robust training for parental responsibility evaluators and child family investigators as well as reforms in the family court system, better victim notification when domestic violence perpetrators purchase firearms, and legislation on coerced debt.

As a promising step forward, El Paso County started a local fatality review team this year. To support that work, our office provided a grant to TESSA, a Colorado Springs-based nonprofit which will be managing the team. Our office looks forward to collaborating with El Paso County on this important work.

This report is a call to action for all to join together in addressing this pressing issue and to save lives.



Philip J. Weiser
Attorney General, State of Colorado

Executive Summary

The findings presented in this report are compiled from information collected on all identified incidents across the state in which someone died in the context of domestic violence (DV) in 2023. These fatalities are referred to as Domestic Violence Fatalities (DVF) throughout this report.

There were 47 DVF cases in 2023 which resulted in 58 fatalities. This is a substantial decrease from the last two years, but this decrease should not be taken as an indication that DV is less of an issue in Colorado. While violent crime, including homicides, has decreased in general, local law enforcement data indicates that the number of DV calls and cases continue to rise. This year, rough estimates indicate that **DVFs accounted for 11% of all homicides in Colorado**. This is a slight decrease in ratio from the last two years, but remains relatively consistent with ratios seen prior to the pandemic. Overall, the rates of DVFs in Colorado remain a significant concern.

Many of the patterns observed this year were similar to years past—the cases overwhelmingly involved male perpetrators and female victims, firearms were the primary cause of death, and there exists a high proportion of collateral deaths (deaths of community members other than the primary DV victim or DV perpetrator). This year, over half of the collateral victims were, tragically, children of the DVF couple. Alarming, **three of the 47 cases involved at least one teenager with perpetrators as young as 15 and one victim as young as 14**. The DV victims ranged in age from 14 to 70, while perpetrators were aged 15 to 81. These cases highlight the need for increased awareness and prevention efforts, including among young populations.

Geographic disparities were also evident in the data, **with rural counties in Colorado experiencing a disproportionately higher rate of DVFs compared to urban areas**. This data aligns with existing research and emphasizes the need for tailored prevention and intervention strategies in rural communities.

This year the Board, thanks to new partnerships with Bridge to Justice and the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, was able to include some broader data sets, and this report includes some of the important new findings that emerged.

First, nearly 20% of DVF cases involved a protection order against the primary DV perpetrator at some point. This indicates that **many primary DV victims in these cases never had any civil or legal system involvement.** People stay in abusive relationships and do not report abuse for many reasons, including difficulty with leaving relationships when individuals have children or when they are financially dependent on the perpetrator. The fact that a protection order was not sought in 80% of DVF cases underscores that abuse can occur even when an individual has not sought court intervention. Conversely, only one DV case had an active DV protection order on the date of the incident. This indicates that **DV protection orders (PO) have an important protective function,** particularly while they are active. This data has informed the Board's recommendation to provide notifications to victims with DV protection orders in place when the perpetrator seeks to purchase a firearm. Victims should have the information necessary to assess their risk and create a safety plan while they have an active PO.

Second, three of the 47 DVF cases involved active family court cases and three had resolved family court cases. This finding mirrors existing research that involvement in custody and other family law disputes are risk factors for DVFs. In response to this finding and other data points, the Board recommends an investment in more robust and nuanced training for family court professionals, including parental responsibility evaluators and child family investigators.

Third, this year **pregnancy was also identified as a significant risk factor for DVFs, particularly for adolescent girls.** This point emphasizes the urgent need for support and protection during this vulnerable period.

About the Colorado Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board

Per C.R.S. § 24-31-702(2)(a), the Colorado Attorney General serves as the chair of the Colorado Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board, which is charged with:

- (a) Examining domestic violence fatality data collected during the preceding year and identifying trends;
- (b) Identifying measures to help prevent domestic violence fatalities and near-death incidents;
- (c) Establishing uniform methods for collecting, analyzing, and storing data relating to domestic violence fatalities and near-death incidents;
- (d) Supporting local fatality review teams by providing technical assistance, training, and necessary coordination;
- (e) Making annual policy recommendations concerning domestic violence to the Colorado General Assembly; and
- (f) Pursuing implementation of any recommendations.

C.R.S. §§ 24-31-702(1)(a), (8)-(10). The Board was established in 2016, and its mandate was renewed for another five years in 2022.

The Board comprises a multi-disciplinary set of leaders and subject matter experts from across Colorado committed to preventing domestic violence and domestic violence fatalities. The Board works with community stakeholders to publish an annual report detailing data and trends on domestic violence fatalities statewide and identifying policy recommendations to prevent these tragedies. The Board also works closely with the Colorado Attorney General's Office. A full list of Board members can be found at the end of this report.

Defining a Domestic Violence Fatality

For this report, the Board defines a domestic violence fatality or DVF as the death of any person that results from an act of domestic violence or occurs in the context of an intimate partner relationship. Such deaths include:

- Homicides in which the victim was the perpetrator's current or former intimate partner.
- Homicides committed by an abusive partner in the context of intimate partner violence—for example, cases in which the homicide perpetrator kills a current or former partner's family member or new intimate partner, law enforcement officer, or bystander.
- Homicides that are an extension of, or in response to, ongoing intimate partner violence—for example, cases in which an abuser takes revenge on a victim by killing the victim's children.
- Homicides of abusers killed by intimate partner violence victims, often in self-defense.
- Homicides of abusers killed by friends, family, or bystanders intervening on behalf of an intimate partner violence victim.
- Suicide of the abuser committed in the context of an intimate partner violence incident.
- Suicides, other than the abusers, that may be a response to intimate partner violence.

In identifying DVFs, the Board is not making a determination of guilt or taking convictions into account but simply considering if there was a death that, based on the available information, arose in the context of domestic violence. Some cases never involve a prosecution, some have pending charges, and some involve fully resolved prosecutions. Whether, on those facts, the case would result in a conviction of any individual is not the determining factor in identifying whether a death was a DVF.

Domestic Violence Fatality Data Collection Process

The findings presented in this report include a compilation of the DVF information collected by the Rose Amond Center on behalf of the Board and the Attorney General's office. Historically, previous reports included all identified DVFs from the prior years, as well as incidents and DVF data analyzed by a local domestic violence fatality review team (DVFRT). This year's report details only the latter category. The Board made the decision to focus only on last year's incidents and to issue a more comprehensive report next year. Next year will mark the 20th year of DVF data collection in Colorado and the Board looks forward to providing the insight that such a large data set can provide.

To identify 2023 DVFs, researchers conducted a diligent search of publicly available sources, including media reports and arrest affidavits, as well as non-public sources—primarily those provided by police, sheriffs, and district attorney's offices. Researchers also reviewed reports issued by the medical examiner's office, court data, and additional public source data such as Gun Violence Archive.

This year, a complete CBI background check review was done for each of the identified perpetrators responsible for each identified DVF. The information available was limited, but helped provide some important insight into the criminal histories of the defendants prior to and around the time of the fatality. However, these criminal histories were limited. In analyzing the data available, the Board decided that the limitations were too significant to publish criminal history data this year. The Board will focus on overcoming these limitations in next year's report.

In partnership with Bridge to Justice,¹ the Board also worked to review the extent to which the victims and perpetrators were involved in domestic relations cases prior to and around the time of the DVF. These new data points are critical to understanding the extent to which custody disputes and interactions with domestic relations courts are risk factors and the Board's analyses are available on pages 28-29.

¹ Bridge to Justice is a 501(c)(3) Colorado nonprofit organization that provides civil legal services to survivors of DV and sexual violence, as well as low- and moderate-income Coloradans who do not qualify for free legal aid.

The partnerships with CBI and Bridge to Justice also helped the Board identify which DVF couples had active or past domestic violence protection orders. The Board is aware that the relative protective value of protection orders is often misunderstood and is a subject of debate, and hopes the data found on page 29 can provide helpful guidance. As in past years, while the Board has made significant progress in expanding the means of accessing data and ensuring that detailed diligence was given to identify as many cases as possible, there are still challenges with obtaining Colorado DVF data. It is therefore likely that some DVFs occurring in 2023 were not identified. The reasons for this vary, but a connection between a fatality and DV is often unknown or unreported, and the method of reporting any evidence of DV within fatality data remains inconsistent. Moreover, additional important DVF data points are also challenging to obtain such as the connections between an identified DVF and missing and murdered Indigenous people, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, and the identification of LGBTQ+ victims.

There may be additional classifications of fatalities such as suicides or other fatalities categorized as “accidental” that occurred in the context of domestic violence but were not identified as such. For example, recently published research suggests there is a current gap in understanding the rates of DV preceding single incident suicides as opposed to DV murder suicides. An analysis of suicide events in North Carolina found that DV was a factor in 439 (4.53 %) suicide cases (Kafka et al, 2022). While an emerging topic, recent national studies estimate that for 6% of youth and 7% of adult suicides, IPV was a contributing factor, with the people who died by suicide being IPV perpetrators, IPV victims, or collateral victims (Kafka et al, 2023). Further research also indicates that it is increasingly common for many perpetrators of DVFs to die of suicide (e.g. Zimmerman et. al, 2022).

Gathering comprehensive data is important to accurately represent the prevalence, dynamics, and risks related to DVFs. The Board, in partnership with the Rose Aodom Center, continuously seeks to evolve internal processes to identify as many cases as possible and to draw out the critical data points within these cases.

About Local Fatality Review Teams

C.R.S. § 24-31-703 enables communities across Colorado to form local DVFRTs to review fatal and near-fatal incidents of domestic violence. Teams are composed of a wide array of stakeholders — law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, advocates, and survivors.

Denver

The Denver Metro Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DMDVFRT) was formed in 1996 and was one of the first review teams in the country. The team is comprised of 25 professionals with multiple perspectives and includes community- and system-based advocates, child welfare advocates, medical providers, offender treatment providers, probation officers, law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges. The team meets monthly to review fatalities within the 1st, 2nd, 17th and 18th Judicial Districts. The DMDVFRT is managed by the Fatality Review Program Manager at the Rose Aandom Center. The Fatality Review Program Manager identifies which DVFs to review monthly and prepares a thorough case review. The case reviews involve a presentation from the assigned detective and/or the district attorney who provide the context for the case, which may include information such as events leading up to the incident, relationship history, abuse history, and case disposition. Afterward, the entire team discusses the risk factors for lethality and what interventions were utilized or missed. Information from the reviews and additional case data are compiled and then analyzed at year's end. The findings are reported to the Board and are reflected here in this report.

El Paso County

Stakeholders in El Paso County are working to lay the groundwork for a DVFRT to review DVFs that occur in Colorado Springs and other jurisdictions in the area. TESSA will manage the El Paso County team, under a Department of Law grant to support its work. The Board is required by statute to support the creation of new local teams and is thankful for the work of El Paso County to create the team. The Board looks forward to collaborating with TESSA and other stakeholders to strengthen Colorado's response to domestic violence.

Mesa County

The Mesa County DVFRT has been active since 2015 and has grown significantly. The team's first review had approximately 17 people, but the most recent review included over 40 professional stakeholders. The Mesa County DVFRT attributes the growth to enhanced community trust in the team's mission and a commitment to fostering collaborations across the community. The Mesa County DVFRT value the relationship built with the Denver local fatality review team over the years. Good working relationships within the community, along with a strong team makeup, are equally vital to their Mesa County's success.

The two co-chairs of the Mesa County DVFRT are a victim advocate from a local law enforcement agency and the domestic violence response team coordinator from the district attorney's office. Prosecutors who worked the underlying DVFs help present overviews of the cases during the reviews. Mesa County conducts roughly two reviews per year.

Pagosa Springs

The town of Pagosa Springs operates a multidisciplinary team of nine professionals who work to improve responses to DV. The team was created in 2008 after an 18-month institutional analysis of the county's criminal justice response to DV. The team has since evolved into a Coordinated Community Response Team (CCRT), which acts as the local DVFRB and local Sexual Assault Review Team (SART). Reviews occur predominantly for near-lethal and fatal criminal cases, but also include misdemeanors and high-risk cases brought by an individual team member. The team meets monthly to identify concrete action steps to improve victim safety and offender accountability, including modification of processes, policies, and procedures within criminal justice, child welfare, victim advocacy, and medical systems.

Colorado Programs and Legislation Mitigating Domestic Violence

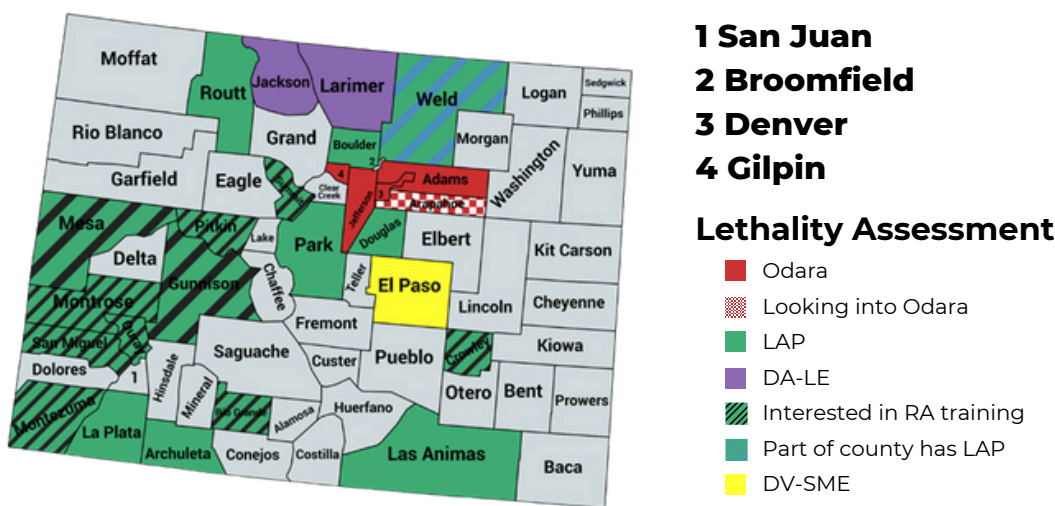
Colorado has several protections that mitigate the risk of domestic violence and DVFs specifically. Highlighted below are two programs that are a focus area for the Board and the Department of Law. Details on additional long-standing protections are [available in the 2022 report](#).

Lethality Assessment Program

In the 2020 annual report, the Board recommended the implementation of the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) across Colorado. The LAP is an evidence-based tool of 11 questions that a law enforcement officer may use to assess risk and connect a victim of intimate partner violence with a confidential victim advocate.

In 2021, the federal government awarded a Justice Administration Grant to the Attorney General’s office to contract with a statewide coordinator tasked with implementing the LAP across Colorado. The statewide coordinator was hired in 2022 and spearheaded the creation of the Colorado Lethality Assessment Program or COLAP. COLAP established a clear process for communities wishing to receive free training on implementing LAP. As of August 2024, there are approximately 36 agencies across six counties utilizing CO LAP.² By the end of 2024, the statewide coordinator aims to have over 50 agencies spread across 10 counties.

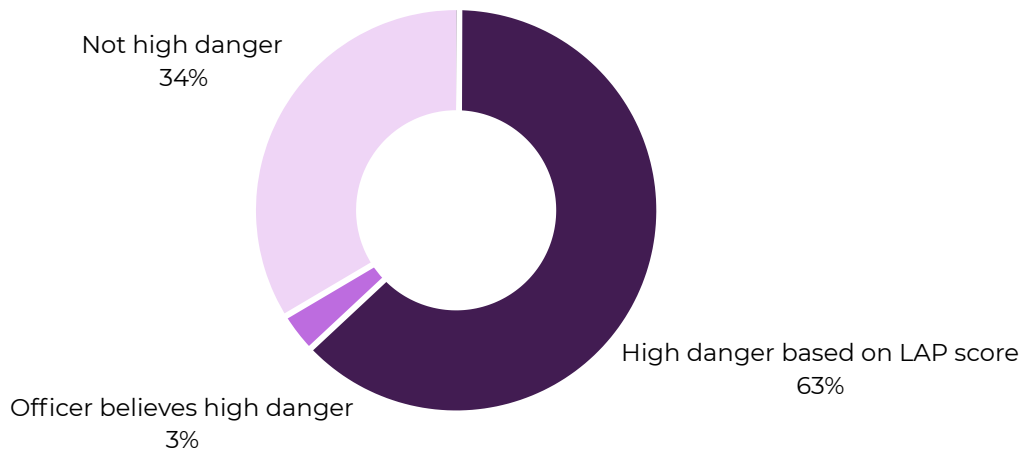
Figure 1



² Figure 1 is a map of Colorado displaying the different risk assessment models that are currently being used in Colorado. Note that this is an approximation.

Figure 1.2

2023 CO LAP Screens (N=737)*



The DOL’s LAP Coordinator analyzed all Colorado LAP screens performed in 2023. Figure 1.2 depicts the total number of screens completed, how many victims were screened based on the officer’s belief, how many victims were designated as high danger based on their score, and the percentages of victims assessed as non-high-danger.³

Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs)

Laws authorizing extreme risk protection orders (also known as ERPOs or “red flag laws”) temporarily prohibit individuals determined by a judge to be at high risk of firearm violence—including any combination of violence directed at others, themselves, or groups of people—from possessing or legally purchasing firearms.

A family member, household member, law enforcement officer or agency, mental health professional, or education professional may request a court to issue an ERPO. If granted, the individual determined to be at risk of harming others must relinquish their firearms and concealed-carry permit, if they have one, and may not purchase new or additional firearms for the duration of the order. While similar firearm restrictions are available through DV protection orders, DV survivors who might not otherwise be able to obtain a DV protection order can consider utilizing ERPOs to mitigate against the risk of firearms. The the Colorado Department of Law received received a federal grant to train law enforcement and education professionals about the use of ERPOs, is in the process of developing a training curriculum, and training is scheduled to begin in 2025.

³ There were 767 screen completed with 737 with a score. Figure 1.2 is based off of the 737 screens with a score.

Office of the Liaison for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives

The Office of the Liaison for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (OMMIR) helps connect families with resources, provides information to the families on how to report a missing or murdered loved one, works collaboratively across systems and communities to increase awareness regarding missing and murdered indigenous people, develops and enhances partnerships with Tribal Law Enforcement and communities, and collaborates with state and local partners to develop training.

2023 Colorado DVF Findings

This year, the report focuses solely on the DVFs which occurred in Colorado during the 2023 calendar year. To have a more robust sample of the DVFs reviewed by local fatality review teams, next year's report will include both the 2023 and 2024 DVFs reviewed by local teams.

Domestic Violence-Related Fatalities in Colorado in 2023

There were 47 DVF cases in 2023 which resulted in 58 fatalities. While this is a significant decrease from the prior two years, the two previous years had exceptionally high numbers of DVFs — 92 DVFs in 2021 and 94 in 2022. Though this drop is very encouraging, it does not necessarily suggest that DV or DVFs are less of an issue in Colorado.

While violent crime and homicide has decreased in Colorado in 2023, DV statewide has not decreased proportionally. The CBI reported only a very minimal (0.3%) decrease in reported DV cases in Colorado.

Local data suggests that DV cases continue to be a challenge. Data from the Denver City Attorney's Office, for example, shows that the number of municipal DV cases prosecuted by that office has continued to increase over the past five years.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Denver Municipal DV Cases	1847	1665	1451	1941	1991

The number of DV cases assigned to the Denver Police Department have also been trending upwards.

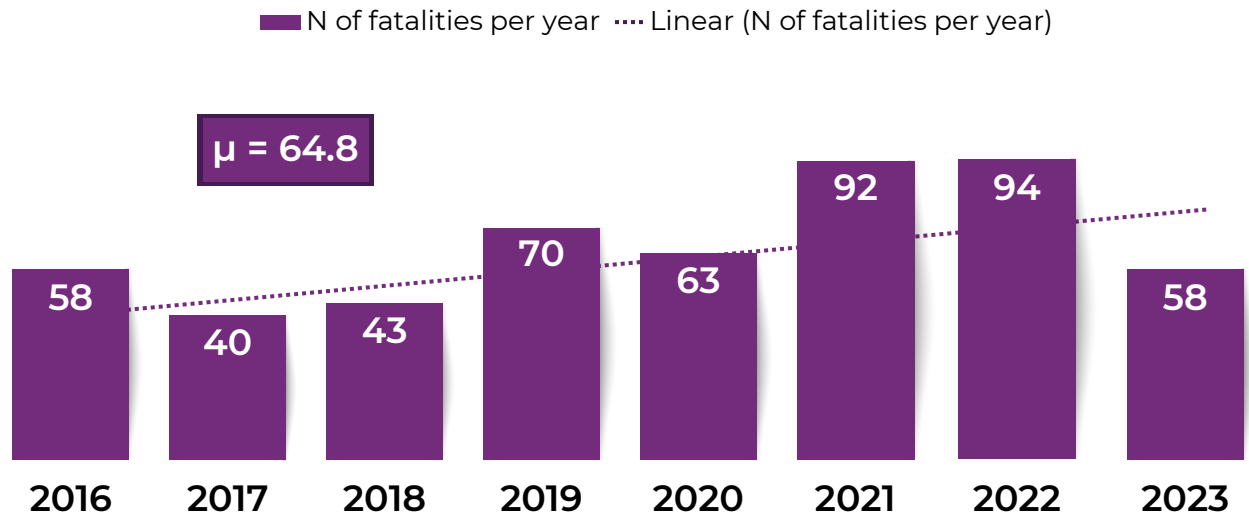
Total Cases Assigned to the Denver Domestic Violence Unit 2019-2023

Year	** Total	% Change
2019	2670	N/A
2020	2732	2.3%
2021	2926	6.6%
2022	3310	11.6%
2023	3612	8.4%
Total	15250	

***Data above is Denver City Attorney Data.*

There are various reasons that DVFs decreased this year. It is likely due in part to the fact that none of the 2023 DVF incidents resulted in more than two fatalities, whereas in the previous two years many cases included multiple fatalities. Notably, one case in 2021 caused seven fatalities and one in 2022 caused four fatalities. Another explanation is that COVID-19 caused an increase in DV and DVFs and this impact has abated (Bhuptani et al., 2024; Kim & Royle, 2024; Pfitzner & McGowan, 2023; Sutton, 2023). This year, DVF data is more in line with pre-COVID data. The average number of DVFs from 2016 through 2023, was 65 per year.

Chart A: Annual Number of DV-Related Fatalities in Colorado, 2016-2023



In general, DVFs represent over 10% of all Colorado homicides over the past four years.⁴ The relative steadiness in the ratio underscores that DVFs remain a significant concern.

DVFs as a Percentage of Colorado Homicides

Year	Total DVFs	% of Colorado homicides
2020	39	12.7%
2021	59	16%
2022	61	15.6%
2023	35	11%
Total	194	

⁴ Next year the Board's intention is to complete a thorough analysis of the ratio of homicides relative to statewide data, considering the data by gender and other variables. This year's data is an initial estimate considering the number of DVF victims relative to the reported number of homicides publicly available on CBI. It is possible that a case by case analysis of each DVF may result in some nuances that may adjust the percentages, but overall this data underscores the significance of DVFs and the reported percentages track national studies. See, e.g., AbiNader 2023.

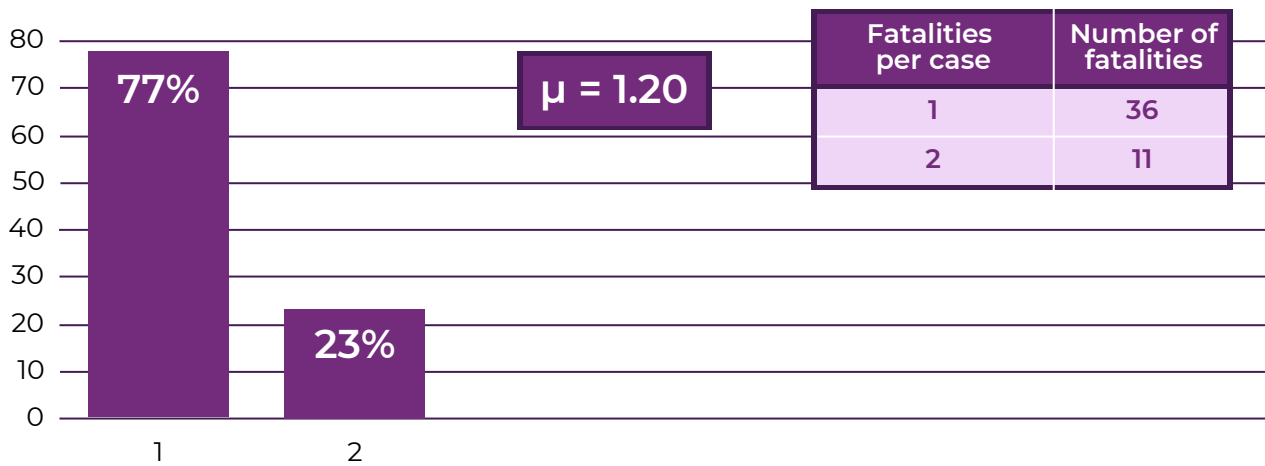
Number of Fatalities per Case

As noted above, the 2023 fatalities per DVF case/incident ranged from one to two, averaging 1.2 deaths per case (see Chart B). Seventy-seven percent of the 2023 Colorado cases involved one fatality, and 23% involved two fatalities.

Chart B: In 2023, in Colorado, there were 47 DV Fatality Cases, Resulting in 58 Fatalities

N = 58 fatalities per 47 DVF cases

■ % of cases x N of fatalities



Characteristics of the DV Victim and DV Perpetrator

While the primary DV victims are not the fatalities in all the cases, this section identifies DV victim characteristics for 46 of the 47 DVF cases in 2023.⁵

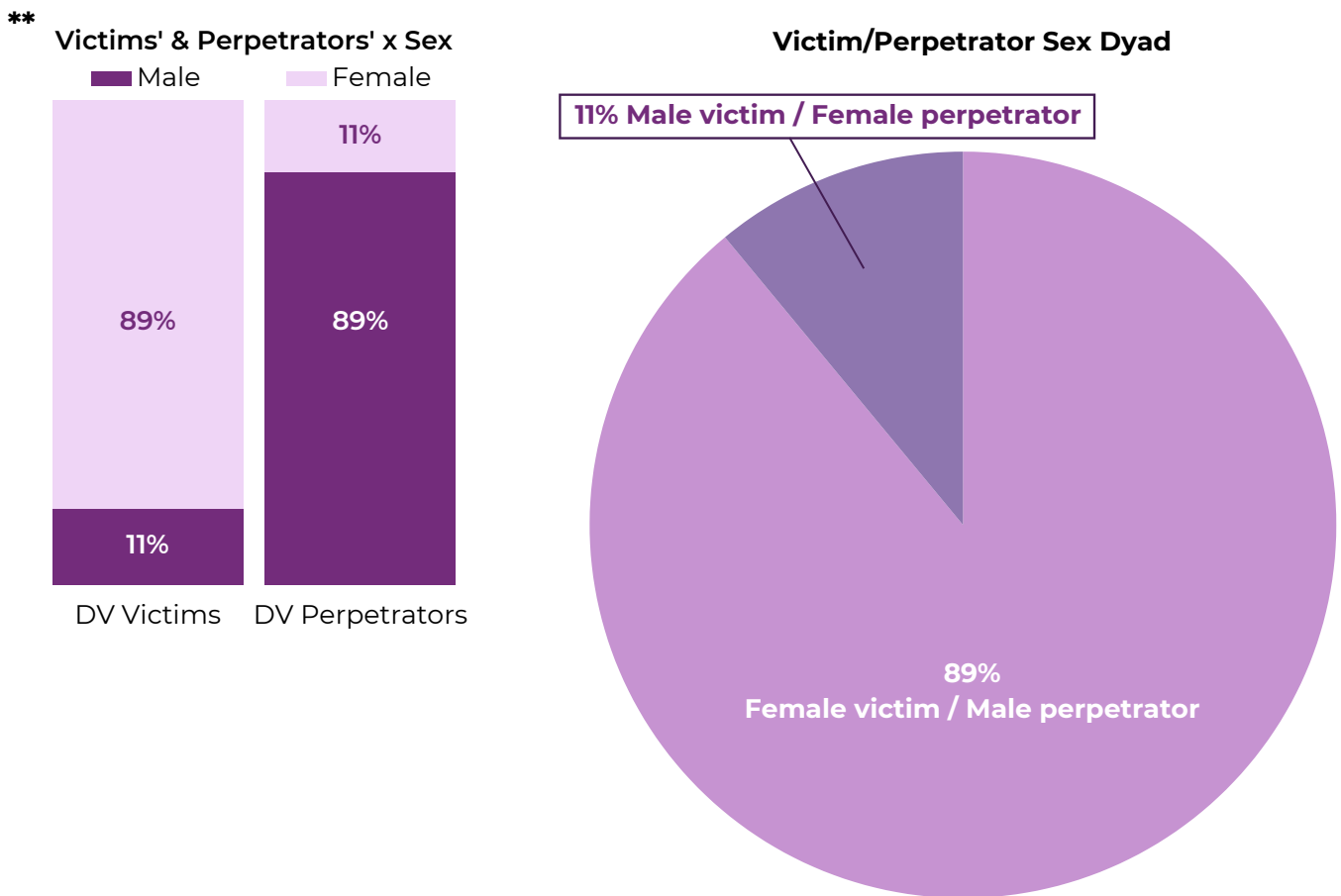
All DVF cases involved different-sex couples. While no same-sex couples were identified, it is important to remember that same-sex DV and DVF cases are less likely to be detected.⁶ Note that most DVF research indicates that same-sex couples constitute 2% to 3% of these homicides (Gannoni & Cussen, 2014; Messing et al., 2021).

⁵ It is currently unclear for one case which individual was the DV perpetrator and which was the DV victim. The male/father had an expired protection order on the date of the incident and had been reported by the female/mother as threatening her with a knife. The knife incident was dismissed for lack of evidence. However, the female (mother) is being charged with killing two of their three joint children (and injuring the third joint child who survived) both of whom are identified as DVF victims in this report.

⁶ There were no indications of any DV victims or perpetrators identified as other than female or male, and no indications of trans, intersex, or gender-nonbinary identities. Gannoni & Cussen (2014, p. 2) provide an excellent explanation of the need for including all sex identities if they are known and the ways that same-sex DVFs are likely undercounted. In most of the DVF cases collected for this report, it would likely be known if the DV victim or perpetrator were trans or gender-nonbinary, but probably less so for intersexed persons.

In the 47 DVF cases that we analyzed, 89% of the DV victims were female and 89% of the DV perpetrators were male (see Chart C). Male perpetrators with female victims constituted the vast majority (95%) of 2023 DVF cases. This is consistent with prior and recent research. See, e.g., Cunningham & Anderson, 2023. Three percent of the cases involved female perpetrators with male victims.

Chart C: Sex and Sex-Dyads of the DV Partners / Ex-Partners (N=46)



***The couple where it was not clear who was the DV perpetrator and who was the DV victim is not included in this chart.*

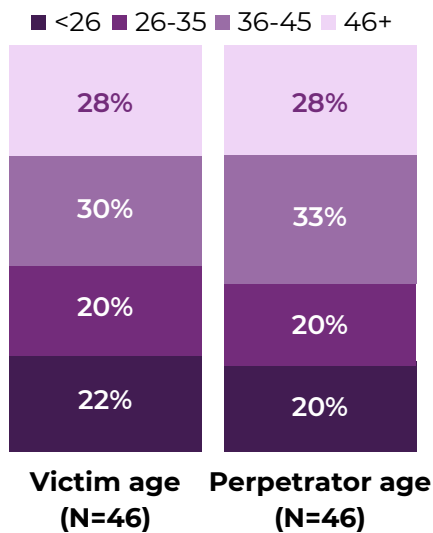
The average age of both the DV victims and perpetrators was 39. 36 to 45 was the largest age group for both (30% of DV victims and 33% of DV perpetrators) (Chart D). The DV victims' ages ranged from 14 to 70, and the DV perpetrators' ages ranged from 15 to 81.

Three (6%) of the 47 cases involved at least one victim or perpetrator who was a teenager. Two perpetrators (4%) were teenage boys – 15 and 16 years old. One killed a current girlfriend aged 14 and the other killed an ex-girlfriend aged 15. The third case involved a 17-year-old ex-girlfriend who killed the 21-year-old current girlfriend of a 21-year-old man. This collateral victim was pregnant. There was one additional teen DV case where a 21-year-old male killed his 19-year-old female date. The findings confirm that DVFs occur across a wide range of ages and teen dating violence is a critical issue and risk factor.

Note that in criminal cases for DVFs involving perpetrators under the age of 18, case information is often withheld and as such the Board is unable to receive as much information about the characteristics of the perpetrators and victims, and the case outcomes. Thus, some data is missing in the remainder of the findings as to these cases.

Chart D & E: DV Victims' & DV Perpetrators' Age & Race

DV Victim & DV Perpetrator Age



DV Victim & DV Perpetrator Race

Race	DV Victim (n=44)	DV Perpetrator (n=45)
White	52%	56%
Hispanic	36%	27%
African American / Black	5%	11%
Asian descent	7%	7%
Native American	0%	0%

Victim range is 14-70 years
 $\mu = 38.8$

Perpetrator range is 15-81 years
 $\mu = 39.4$

In 84% of cases, the perpetrator and victim were same-race couples.

- 49% White-White
- 23% Hispanic-Hispanic
- 7% Asian Descent-Asian Descent
- 5% Black-Black

In 16% of cases, the perpetrator and victim were different-race couples.

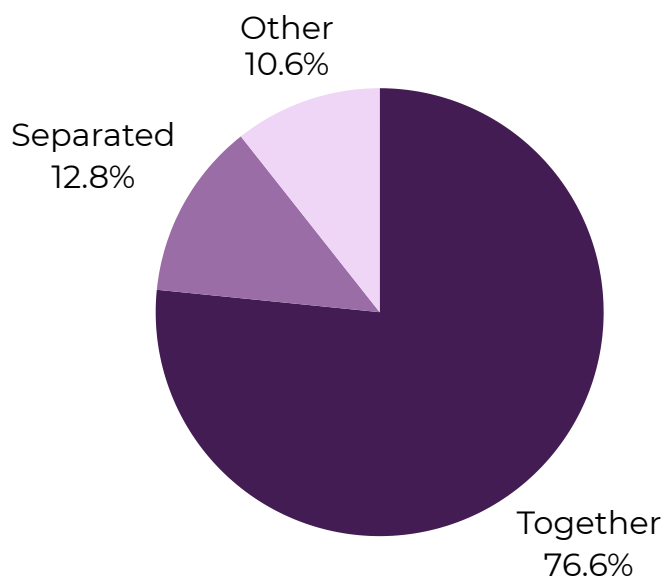
- 7% White-Hispanic
- 5% Hispanic-White
- 5% Black-Hispanic

The DV victims and perpetrators were predominantly white (52% of victims, 56% of perpetrators), followed by Hispanic/Hispanic (36% of victims, 27% of perpetrators) (Chart E). Five percent of the DV victims and 11% of the DV perpetrators were African American/Black. Seven percent of both the DV victims and the DV perpetrators were of Asian descent. None (0%) of the DV victims or perpetrators were Native American (see Chart D).

Race dyads were calculated among the 43 DVF cases where both the DV victim and perpetrator races were known. Most (84%) of the cases involved couple of the same-race. Almost half (49%) were white-white, about a quarter (23%) were Hispanic-Hispanic, and three cases (7%) were Asian descent-Asian descent. Seven percent (n = 3) of the cases were white perpetrators with Latina victims, five percent (n = 2) were Latino perpetrators with white victims, and five percent (n = 2) were Black perpetrators with Latina victims.

The relationship status of the DVF couple on the date of the DVF indicates that 79% of the cases involved couples that were still together (i.e., married, dating, boy/girlfriend, or fiancé), and 21% were broken up (i.e., ex-boy/girlfriend, divorced, estranged, and formerly engaged). In all dating, boy/girlfriend, estranged, and current or formerly engaged relationships, the DV victim was female, and the DV perpetrator was male (Chart F). Seventy-five percent of the married cases were male DV perpetrators and female DV victims, and 83% of the ex-boy/girlfriend relationships were male DV perpetrators and female DV victims. There were two cases where the couple was divorced, one of which is the case where it is unclear who is the DV perpetrator and who is the DV victim. This data suggests as in years past, DVFs occur across relationship statuses.

Chart F: Domestic Violence Couple Relationship at DOI (N=47)



Pregnancy has been identified as one of the riskiest times for women and girls to be killed by their current or former romantic partners (Soares et al., 2024), and one study found this risk increased among adolescents and Black women and girls (Wallace et al., 2016). Adolescents were the highest-risk age group and their risk was twice as high as for women 36 and older. Id.

The 2023 DVFs in Colorado included two cases (4.3%) involving pregnant females (Chart G). One case involved a 17-year-old girl who killed her ex-boyfriend's 21-year-old girlfriend who was pregnant with twins. The other involved a 19-year-old pregnant woman who killed her 18-year-old boyfriend in self-defense. A study on the Colorado Family Planning Initiative (CFPI) found an inverse relationship “between contraception access and IPH, which declined by 62% during the first 4 years of the CFPI” (Smith, Bailey, & Cascio, 2024, p. 341).

Chart G: DVFs and Pregnant Women

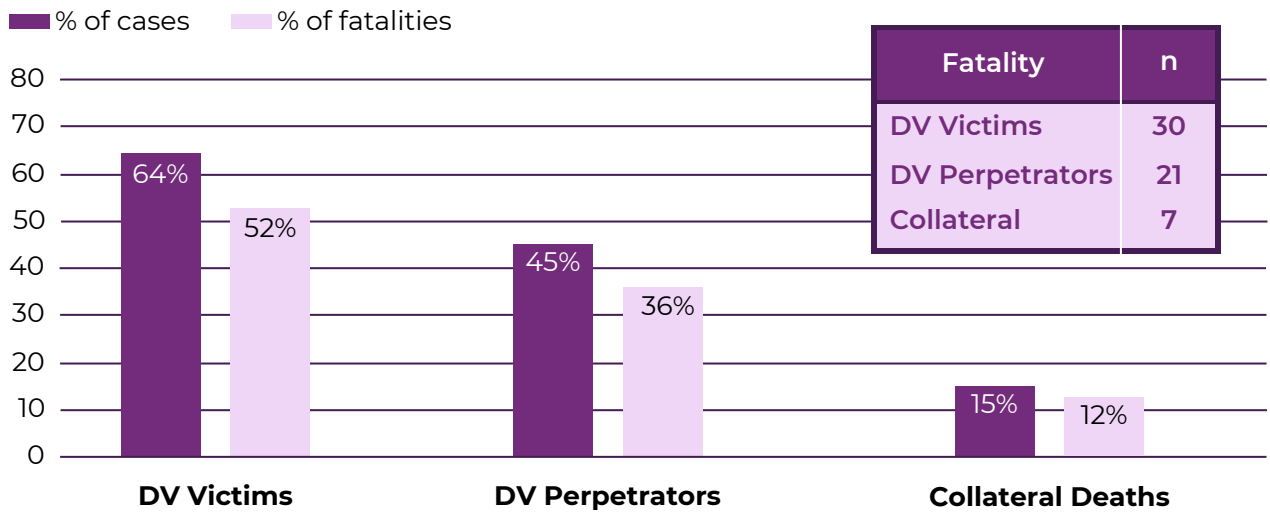
- Pregnancy has been identified as one of the riskiest times for domestic violence fatalities.
- Of the 47 cases, two (4.3%) included pregnant women.
 - In one case, a 17-year-old girl killed her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend, who was 21 and pregnant with twins.
 - The other case involved a pregnant 19-year-old woman who killed her 18-year-old boyfriend. The death was determined to be in self-defense.



A Comparison of DV Victim, Perpetrator, and Collateral Fatalities

Chart H distinguishes fatalities among three primary groups: DV victims, DV perpetrators, and collateral victims. This chart includes the percentage representation of these three groups in terms of their incidence among the 47 cases and their prevalence among the 58 fatalities. As expected, DV victims comprised the highest percentage of deaths in both the case (64%) and total fatality (52%) data. Next most likely were DV perpetrator deaths (45% of cases and 36% of total fatalities), and finally, collateral deaths (15% of cases and 12% of total fatalities). These findings underscore that DVFs are not restricted to DV victims.

Chart H: Percent of Fatalities among the 47 Cases and the 58 Fatalities



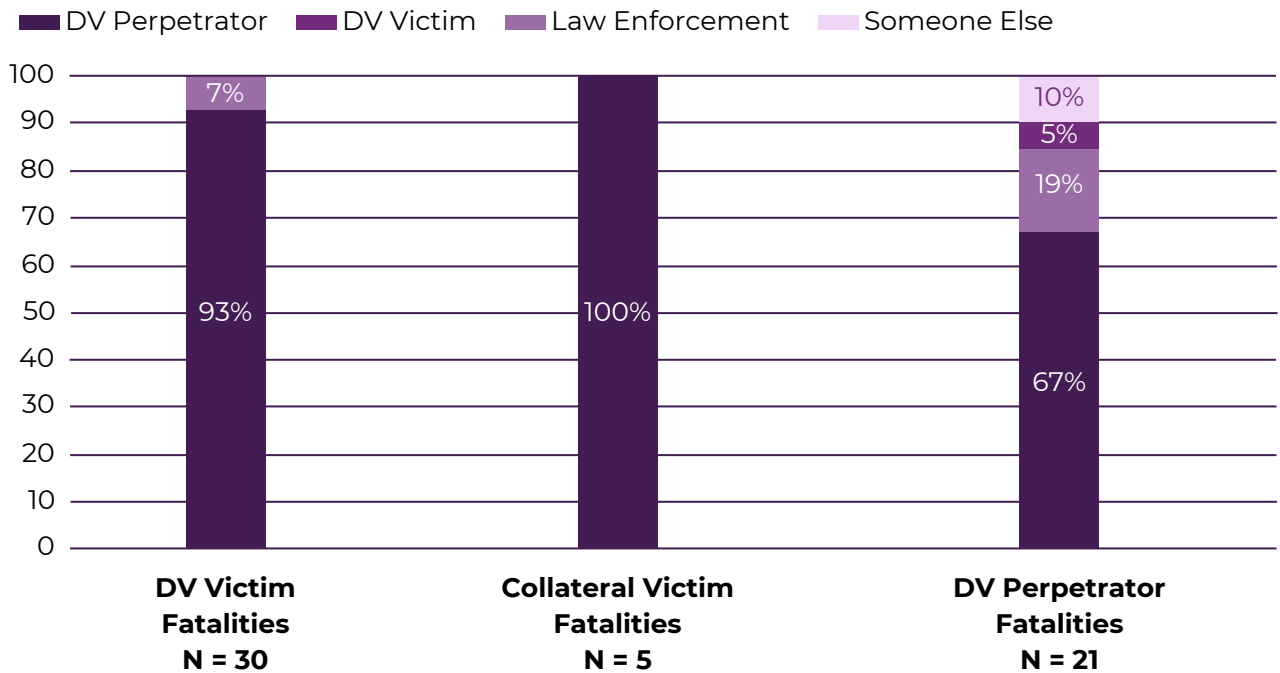
Victim Fatalities

This was a unique year in that two cases involved DV victims who died by suicide (Chart I). Although not as prevalent as DV perpetrators’ likelihood of dying by suicide, a growing body of research is documenting the elevated risk of IPV survivors’ suicidal thoughts or actions (e.g., Jiwatram-Negrón et al. 2023; Kafka et al., 2023; White et al., 2024). Recent studies estimate that for 6% of youth and 7% of adult suicide deaths, DV was a contributing factor, with the people who died by suicide being DV perpetrators, DV victims, or collateral victims (Kafka et al., 2022). The remaining DV victims were killed by the DV perpetrators.

There were seven collateral victims—that is victims who were community members and not the primary DVF victim or perpetrator. Of these, three were children as detailed below.

One of the cases involved two collateral fatalities (both joint children) killed by the mother, however, it is unclear whether she or the children’s father was the DV perpetrator. Of the remaining five collateral victims across the cases, all were killed by the DV perpetrators. Consistent with the risk of pregnant women’s representation among DVFs is “that the safety of the children is inextricably linked to the safety of the adult victim, safety planning for the female intimate partner should include the children” (Olszowy et al., 2013, p. 201).

Chart I: Who Killed the DV Victims, Collateral Victims, & DV Perpetrators



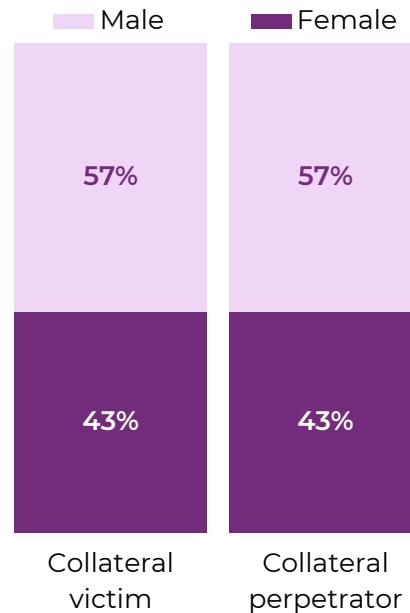
Perpetrator Fatalities

Two-thirds (67%) of the DV perpetrator fatalities were by suicide and 19% (n = 4) were killed by law enforcement. One (5%) involved a DV victim who killed the perpetrator. In two cases (10%), the DV perpetrators were killed in other circumstances. In one, the DV victim’s new boyfriend killed the DV perpetrator and in another the DV perpetrator was attempting to escape the police in his car, jumped out and ran, and was accidentally hit and killed by a driver unrelated to the DV couple. In all DV perpetrator fatality cases that were not by suicide (i.e., law enforcement, DV victim, DV victim’s new boyfriend, and car driver), the individuals who killed the perpetrator were not considered criminally responsible.

Collateral Fatalities

As previously stated, 15% of the cases involved collateral fatalities, and 12% of the deaths were collateral victims (Chart H). Although the seven collateral fatalities is smaller relative to the total, it is important to report the characteristics of these cases. Males and females were similarly represented among the collateral victims and perpetrators; 57% of both perpetrators and victims were male, and 43% of both perpetrators and victims were female (Chart J). Three collateral victims were males killed by a male, two were females killed by a female, one was a male killed by a female, and a female killed by a male.

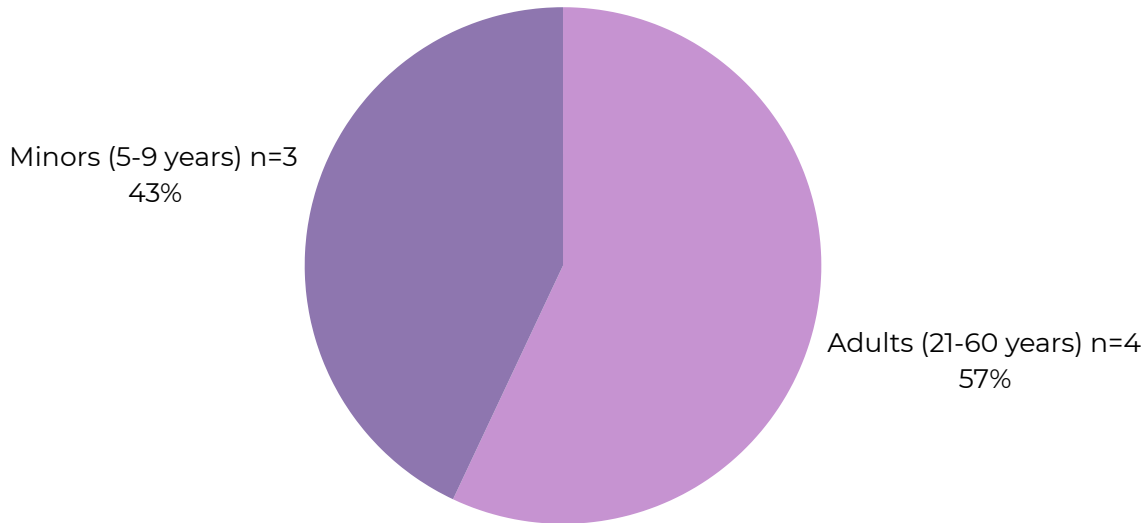
Chart J: Collateral victims' and perpetrators' sex (N=7)



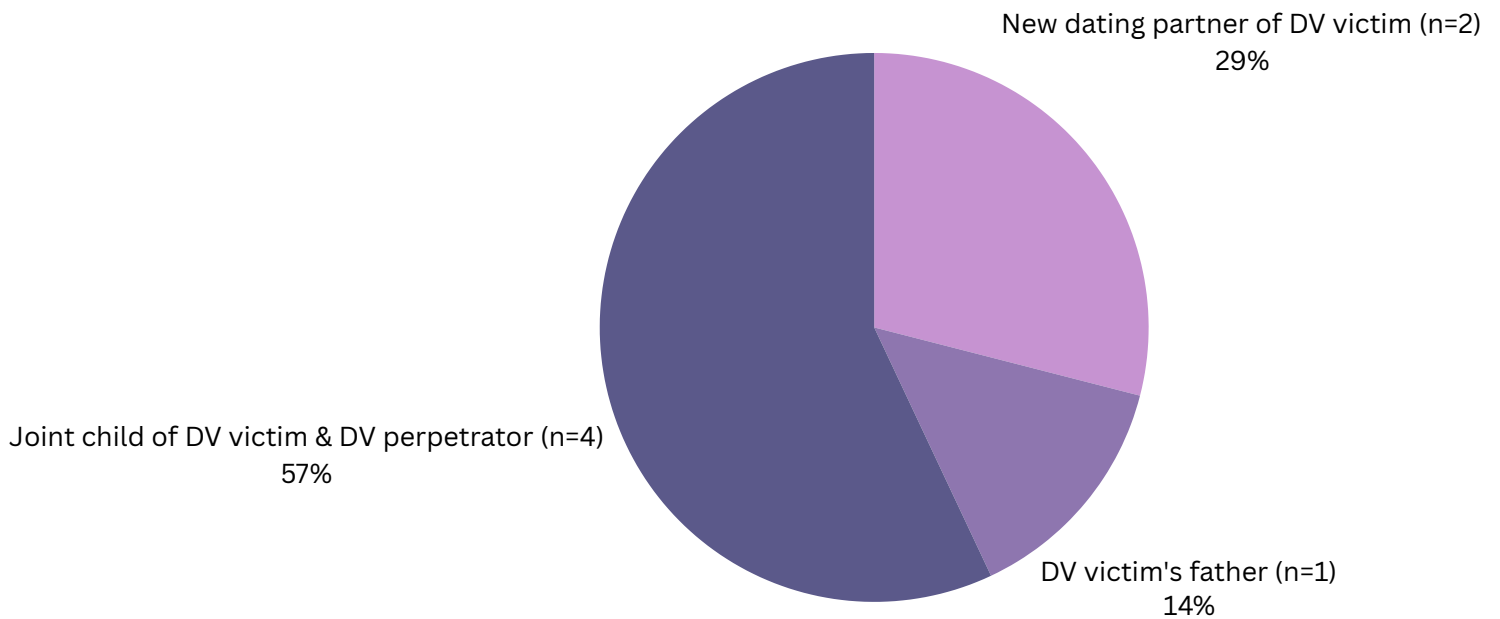
The seven collateral victims ranged from 5 to 60 years old (Chart K). Four (57%) collateral victims were adults (aged 21 to 60 years old) and three (43%) were minors (aged 5 to 9 years old). The predominant collateral victim-offender relationship was a joint child of the DV perpetrator and DV victim; four (57%) of the collateral victims were joint children of the DV couple, aged 5, 7, 9, and 35 years old. The oldest was the adult daughter who was disabled (and a joint child of a DV couple). Two (29%) of collateral victims were known or suspected dating partners of the DV victim.

Chart K: Collateral Victim's Ages & Relationships to Who Killed Them (N=7)

** Collateral Victim's Age Average Age = 27



Victim-Offender Relationship



***All collateral minors were joint children of the DV couple, and another collateral victim was the adult daughter of a DV couple, who was 35 and disabled.*

Firearms are the Overwhelming Cause of DVFs

Consistent with existing DVF research and previous reports, firearms are the most common weapons involved in DVFs, and gunshot wounds are the most frequent cause of DVF deaths (Chart L). Specifically, in 2023 in Colorado, 76% (n = 44) of the DVFs were from guns or gunshot wounds. Of the 21 DV perpetrator fatalities, all were by firearms, except an outlier case where a truck driver accidentally killed a DV perpetrator who left his car in heavy traffic to run away from the police. Sixty-three percent (n = 19) of DV victims and 71% (n = 5) of the collateral victims were killed by firearms. A recent study of 11,594 child homicides from 2003 to 2020 in the U.S. found “multiple factors were associated with greater odds of child firearm homicides being IPV-related” (Wilson et al., 2023, p. 1). Knives/sharp objects/stabbing was the cause of death for 9% (n = 5) of the total DVF victims.

Chart L: Causes of Death (N=58) **

Weapon/Injury	Total (N=58)	DV victim (N=30)	Collateral victim (n=7)	Perp. fatality (n=21)
Firearm/GSW	76%	63%	71%	95%
Knife/Sharp Obj./Stabbing	9%	10%	14%	0%
2+ Non-gun weapons	3%	7%	0%	0%
Other	12%	20%	14%	5%

** Two DV victims died by suicide.

** The combination of weapons included blunt objects, knives, ropes, hands (to strangle), etc.

** The “other” weapons included poison, drugs, a rope, and blunt objects for the DV victim, a blunt object for a collateral victim, and among the DV perpetrators, a truck driver who accidentally ran into and killed a DV perpetrator fleeing the police.

DVFs Relationship to Domestic Relations Court Cases

DVF and domestic relations court cases are often intertwined. While domestic relations courts can assist in resolving disputes such as divorce, custody, and child support, they can also be a battleground for abusers seeking to maintain control over their victims. In many cases, domestic violence victims seek protection orders through domestic relations courts, but their actions are frequently misinterpreted as attempts to gain an advantage over child custody. Furthermore, the court process itself can present risks for victims, especially if their abuser is granted visitation rights or custody of their children. Understanding the relationship between DVFs and domestic relations court cases is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

For the first time, through a partnership with Bridge to Justice, a nonprofit which provides civil legal services to low- and moderate-income Coloradans, the report includes civil legal system data. Bridge to Justice was able to provide data on 43 of the 47 DVF cases this year. Thirteen percent (n = 6) of the DVF cases had involved domestic relations courts at some point. Half of these, 6.4% (n = 3) had active cases in domestic relations courts at the time of the fatality.⁷ An additional 7% (n = 3) had a DR case at some earlier point. These findings mirror what is well established in research — that custody disputes and interactions with the domestic relations courts can be risk factors for DVFs.

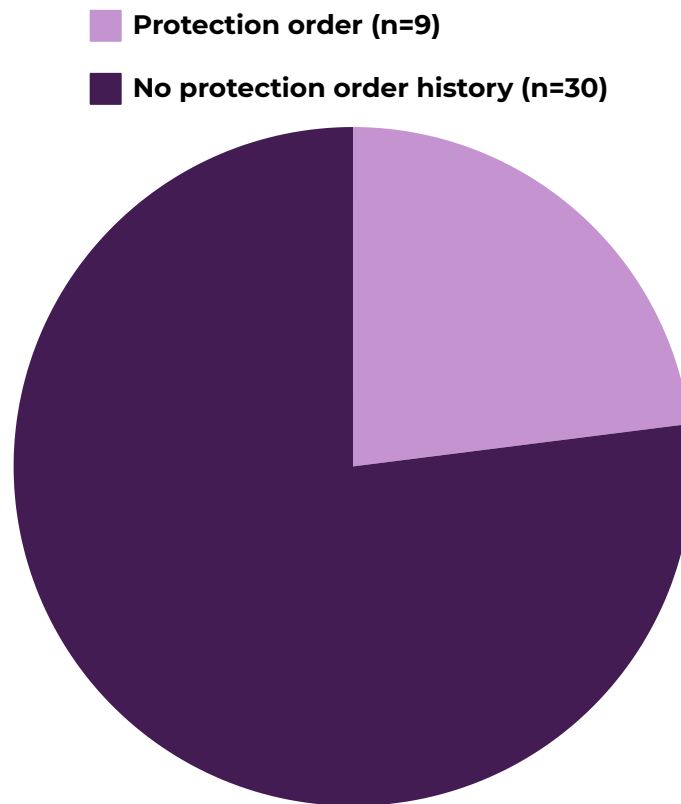
DVFs and Protection Orders

Domestic violence protection orders (POs) are a crucial tool for safeguarding victims from further harm, but many DV victims do not seek POs and there is sometimes a question on whether or not POs provide safety. In an effort to better understand the role of POs in DVFs, this year, for the first time, the Board in partnership with CBI and Bridge to Justice, was able to access more complete PO data. Combining data from CBI and Bridge to Justice, the Board was able to determine that 36% (n = 17) of the 47 DVF cases, had a victim or perpetrator with a PO history, but it was not always clear if the PO involved the DVF victim and perpetrator or past partners. The CBI data more directly accounted for POs within the DVF couple and the Board was able to identify information on 39 of our 47 DVF cases. According to these CBI data (Chart M), almost a fifth (19%, n = 9) of the DVF couples had at least one PO at some point in their relationship. Only one case had an active PO at the time of the fatality. In this case, the criminal protection order was part of the terms of the defendant's probation, so it was still active at the time of the fatality.⁸

⁷ In one case, the file was suppressed. However, in reviewing the homicide case, the defendant was not charged with a violation of protection order, so we can state with high certainty that no protection orders were in place protecting that victim.

⁸ In this case, the criminal protection order was part of the terms of the defendant's probation, so it was still active at the time of the fatality.

Chart M: History of Protection Orders in the DV Relationship (N=39)



There are important implications from these findings. First, the fact that a nearly 20% of DVF cases had a PO at some point, but only one case had an active PO at the time of death, indicates that POs have a protective function while the PO is active. This is a critical finding to combat perceptions that POs never protect victims and to reiterate that POs are an important part of a victim's safety planning.

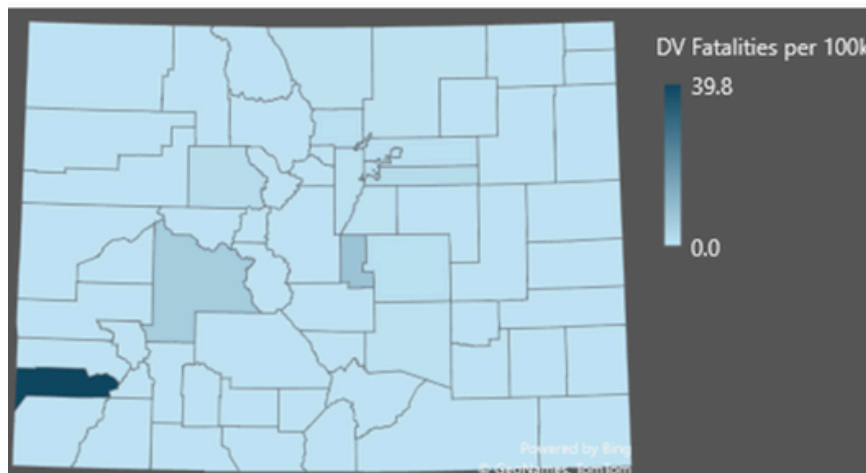
Second, these findings underscore that many DV victims do not interact with the civil legal system. People stay in abusive relationships and do not report abuse for many reasons, including the difficulty for individuals to leave relationships when they have children or financial dependence with the perpetrator. The Board understands that there is a perception, particularly in the legal system, that if victims have not previously reported abuse or sought a PO, allegations brought later are not true. Recognizing that a PO was not sought in nearly 80% of DVF cases underscores that lack of seeking system involvement does not necessarily indicate that the DV victim, and children in the relationship, were not in danger.

County and Population DVF Patterns

The 2023 Colorado DVF data were mapped by the county of occurrence, controlling for the number of DVFs in a county per 100,000 people (Chart M). Fifteen of the 64 Colorado counties (23%) had at least one DVF, and the number of DVFs per county ranged from 0 to 14. The number of DVFs per 100,000 in the population in each county ranged from 0.0 (77%, n = 49 counties) to 39.8. Four of the five counties with the highest number of DV fatalities per 100,000 in the population are among the less populated/more rural counties in Colorado: Dolores County (39.8 fatalities per 100,00), Teller County (8.1 fatalities per 100,00), Gunnison County (5.8 fatalities per 100,00), and Eagle County (1.8 fatalities per 100,00). The remaining 11 counties with at least one DVF are all in the more populated counties, including counties with urban areas. This is consistent with research indicating elevated DVFs in more rural than urban counties (Gillespie & Reckdenwald, 2017).

Chart O: 2022 DV Fatalities x Country per 100,000 people

Chart O: 2023 DV Fatalities by County per 100,000 People



County	Fatalities/ 100k	# of Fatalities
Dolores	39.8	1
Teller	8.1	2
Gunnison	5.8	1
Arapahoe	2.1	14
Eagle	1.8	1
Denver	1.4	10
Broomfield	1.3	1
El Paso	1.1	8
Adams	0.9	5
Boulder	0.9	3
Douglas	0.8	3
Jefferson	0.7	4
Pueblo	0.6	1
Weld	0.6	2
Larimer	0.5	2

Victim Stories

When these stories make the news, the stories of these victims have been told for them, often stripped of those attributes and characteristics of who they were. We choose now to share their highlights and accolades that many knew, didn't get the chance to know. Our best efforts were made to locate photos, and quotes from family and loved ones.



Liam Brueche

"Liam loved cars and trucks, dirt, and riding his bike and scooter. He also loved being outside in the sun and mountain sand."



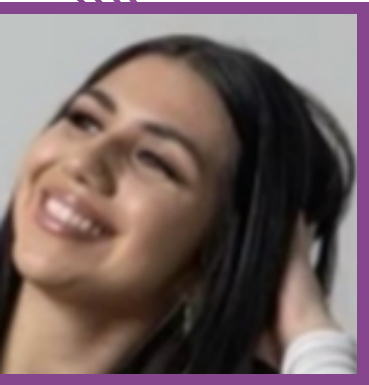
Katherine Peters

The CDVFRB remembers Katherine Peters.



Khitam Jumaah

"My parents, they were really good people, really good providers and everything. Especially my mom, my mom was, like, the best mom ever. She was the best person."



Tommie Bowman

"Tommiekae truly lived life to the fullest by following her dreams to travel across the world, spreading positivity, inspiring and uplifting those around her, and bringing people closer to God."



Karol Bedoya

"She loved soccer, the kids; she was soccer mom in every way you can think of."



Melanie Massey

The CDVFRB remembers Melanie Massey.



Payshas Whatley

"Always happy, always joyful. She walked in the room, she brought people together, she lit up the room. She was a good person."



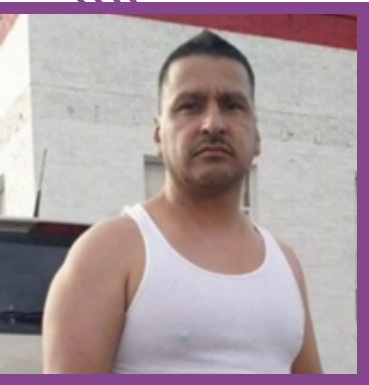
Anna Marie Trabold

The CDVFRB remembers Anna Marie Trabold.



Angela Craig

“Ang loved animals (though she was allergic to almost all of them), food truck food, mystery television shows, and really anything that could make her laugh. She loved being outside, and though she would tell you that she didn’t like to socialize all that much, she was great at talking to people.”



David Trujillo

The CDVFRB remembers David Trujillo.



Pavitra Rana

The CDVFRB remembers Pavitra Rana.



Ruth Maclaren

The CDVFRB remembers Ruth Maclaren.



Tracy Lee Lechner

“Tracy’s life was marked by her compassion, kindness, and positive influence on those around her.”



Laila Combes

The CDVFRB remembers Laila Combes.



Macy Machetta

The CDVFRB remembers Macy Machetta.



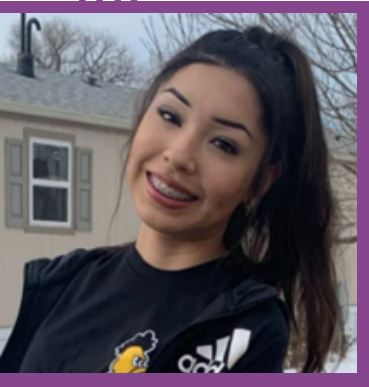
Alfred Garcia

The CDVFRB remembers Alfred Garcia.



Celeste Hendry

The CDVFRB remembers Celeste Hendry.



Lily Silva Lopez

“She enjoyed shopping, clothes, makeup and dancing.”



Nancy Macarenas

The CDVFRB remembers Nancy Macarenas.



Lourdes Rodriguez

The CDVFRB remembers Lourdes Rodriguez.



Tu Thein

The CDVFRB remembers Tu Thein.



Colin Grice

The CDVFRB remembers Colin Grice.



Joslyn Teetzel

The CDVFRB remembers Joslyn Teetzel.



Shayna Johnson

“Shayna was a fun-loving lady, who enjoyed life and those she encircled. In her free time, Shayna enjoyed watching her Denver Broncos, hanging with her family, eating, listening to music, watching her shows and just plain relaxing and doing nothing.”



Suany Melgar Almendarez

The CDVFRB remembers Suany Melgar Almendarez.



Christine Goodson

The CDVFRB remembers Christine Goodson.



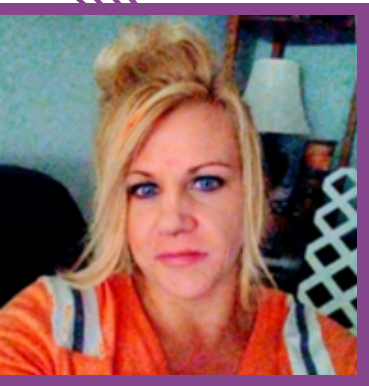
Stephanie Long

The CDVFRB remembers Stephanie Long.



Oliveah Fransua

“She loved her sunsets, her sunrises, she liked to do her makeup, her hair. She was very self-confident. She loved her friends and her family.”



Tara Cathcart

“Tara was a mother, sister & aunt. Tara loved to be around friends and animals, especially her dog Ralphie.”



Adonais Gallegos

“He was a very loving, very loving gentleman.”



Lucille Ruibal

“Lucille was able to see the possibilities that it means to be a people of woven ancestry and heritage — of what beautiful things can be created in the world.”



Talay Salazar

“Talay had a beautiful soul, a distinct smile and her laugh was something you could never forget.”



Kristil Krug

“Was a remarkable soul who touched the lives of those around her with her passion for the performing arts, modern dance, and an exceptional intellect in the sciences.”



Steven Craig

“Being a Grandad brought him boundless joy and fulfillment. Steven loved traveling and playing golf. He also volunteered with the Niwot Rotary. But what really lit up his life was sports, especially the Colorado Avalanche and Celtic Football Club.”



Sachely Diaz

The CDVFRB remembers Sachely Diaz.



Aden Wentz

The CDVFRB remembers Aden Wentz.



Ellie Wentz

The CDVFRB remembers Ellie Wentz.

2024 Recommendations

Develop a training for Child and Family Investigators (CFIs) and Parental Responsibilities Evaluators (PREs) focused on domestic violence

During the past year, the Board worked to develop a robust understanding of the impact of the family court system on domestic violence victims. This year, for the first time, the Board in partnership with Bridge to Justice reviewed all 2023 DVF cases to identify how many had open family court cases open at the time of the fatality. The findings can be found on pages 15-30 and indicate that involvement in family court, also referred to as the domestic relations court, are a risk factor for DVFs and it is critical that system actors are aware of the connection and are well-trained to address DV with the court system.

In speaking with advocates and victims across the state, it is evident that victims are not believed by various actors within the system and given the nature of DV, often lack evidence or outside corroboration of the abuse they have experienced. Failure to adequately understand the dynamics and risks posed in these situations can be fatal. In the case of the murder of Cameron Lynn Zipperer, 8, and Audrey Jane Zipperer, 6, their mother (and Board member) Erica Bethel repeatedly discussed the abuse she and her children faced from Ms. Bethel's ex-husband with the judges and multiple Parental Responsibility Evaluator (PRE) assigned to her family court case. Ms. Bethel repeatedly presented evidence of risk factors that caused her to fear for her girls' safety including stalking, punching holes in walls, threats of harm, suicidal ideation, and gun ownership. Ms. Bethel expressed she feared her children would be harmed if left with their father in an unsupervised capacity. Unfortunately, such unsupervised parenting time was awarded, and her ex-husband murdered both children during one of these visits.

Child and Family Investigators (CFIs) and PREs play a particularly important role within the family court system. Specifically, they provide written recommendations to the court as to the allocation of parental responsibilities. Though the recommendations from CFIs and PREs are not legally binding,⁹ many judges do not stray from the findings presented and these findings are often critical to a court's decision. This makes it crucial for CFIs and PREs to be well-trained, particularly on best practices in understanding domestic violence situations.

⁹ C.R.S. § 14-10-116.5(2)(b); C.R.S. § 14-10-127.

Currently, to be eligible for appointment, CFIs and PREs must complete at least 20 hours of initial training related to domestic violence and child abuse and at least 15 additional hours of ongoing training every five years.¹⁰ The training must be provided by someone with “substantial experience in assisting survivors of domestic violence or child abuse” and must “rely on evidence-based and peer-reviewed research conducted by recognized experts or research conducted in the field by recognized domestic violence victim advocates.”¹¹ Based on initial research conducted by the Board, it does not appear that there are many eligible training offerings in Colorado, nor trainings that fully and accurately account for DV dynamics with the family court system.¹²

The Board recommends that a robust, nuanced, and statutorily-compliant training be developed and reliably offered to CFIs and PREs. This training should focus on various aspects of domestic violence dynamics, including risk factors for lethality, coercive control, and strategies used by abusers to manipulate the family court system. The training should also address mechanisms to overcome bias and compassion fatigue.

While this recommendation focuses on training for PREs and CFIs, components of the training that the Board recommends could also benefit other professionals within the family law system, such as guardians ad litem, counsel for youth, legal representatives of the child, mediators, and judges.¹³ Therefore, the Board recommends that the training be developed in such a way that relevant elements of the training could be offered to other stakeholders.

¹⁰ C.R.S. § 14-10-127.5(5)(a). The State Court Administrator’s Office also requires a CFI complete an additional and separate 40 hours of training offered by SCAO before they can be added to the eligibility roster.

¹¹ C.R.S. § 14-10-127.5(6).

¹² According to an interview with staff at State Judicial, only one entity currently offers training that satisfies the requirements for CFIs and PREs—the Colorado School for Family Therapy, directed by Dr. Reo Leslie. Video Interview with Joel Borgman, Family Programs Unit Manager, Colorado State Court Administrator’s Office & Jaime Watman, CFI and PRE Programs Coordinator, Colorado State Court Administrator’s Office (Jun. 27, 2024); see Dr. Reo Leslie, Jr., LPC, LMFT, LAC, RPT-S, MAC, ACS, Colorado School for Family Therapy, <https://familyplaytherapy.net/about/dr-reo-leslie/> (last visited Jul. 9, 2024).

¹³ Guardians ad litem and counsel for youth are lawyers who represent children in delinquency and neglect cases. C.R.S. § 19-1-111; C.R.S. 19-1-115. They must complete trainings that are approved by the Office of the Child’s Representative (OCR). Supreme Court of Colorado, Office of the Chief Justice, Court Appointments Through the Office of the Child’s Representative, 8 (2023). Legal representatives of the child are lawyers who defend the child’s best interests in domestic relations proceedings that involve the allocation of parental responsibilities. C.R.S. § 14-10-116. If they contract with the OCR, legal representatives of the child must complete the same training as guardians ad litem and counsel for youth. Court Appointments Through the Office of the Child’s Representative, supra, at 8. If they do not contract with the OCR, they must meet the same training requirements as CFIs and PREs. C.R.S. § 14-10-127.5(5)(a). Therefore, if our proposed training were approved by the OCR, guardians ad litem, counsel for youth, and legal representatives of the child could fulfill their training requirements by completing the new training program.

Increase the use of risk assessment tools in organizations and systems that work directly with domestic violence survivors

Last year, the Board recommended focusing on increasing the use of risk assessment tools in organizations that work directly with domestic violence survivors. In pursuit of this work, the Board conducted a statewide survey and identified a few key learnings.

First, most advocacy agencies surveyed used a form of a risk assessment and the “Danger Assessment” or a version thereof was the most commonly used. Second, law enforcement agencies are increasing in their use of LAP as a risk assessment tool, but the use of LAP is not yet ubiquitous. Third, other systems that have deep interactions with victims of domestic violence including judges, family law practitioners, and court system personnel do not typically use a risk assessment tool.

The Board recommends a continued investment in the use of tools that assess the risk to victims for further victimization or fatality, referred to here as risk assessment tools. Such tools should be evaluated for both organizations and systems that work directly with domestic violence survivors.¹⁴

First, the Board continues to recommend the increased use of LAP by law enforcement and providing comprehensive training. The Attorney General’s office has received another federal grant to continue the COLAP program (addressed on page 13), and the Board believes use of LAP on all domestic violence calls remains a best practice and should be used by every law enforcement agency in the state.

Second, the Board will investigate how it can research ways to incorporate risk assessments into systems that do not currently use risk assessment tools, and how it can encourage another actor to do so. In particular, the Board will want to evaluate whether or how a risk assessment tool (such as Danger Assessment) could be utilized in domestic relations cases and by judges more generally. As the Board encourages the creation of better PRE and CFI training programs, it also encourages that such trainings should consider how to incorporate risk assessment.

¹⁴ Note that these risk assessment tools are unique to the context of domestic violence and are different in kind than risk assessment tools utilized in different settings, including in carceral settings. Notably, they assess not the risk of the individual committing future harm, but the risk to the individual from becoming a victim of harm or death in the context of domestic violence.

Require that victims be given the choice to be notified if the subject of a restraining order they sought protection against attempts to purchase a firearm

In Colorado, when someone attempts to purchase a gun from a licensed firearms dealer, their information is submitted to the CBI Instacheck Unit, which performs a background check of various databases. There are many reasons a person may fail a background check, including that they are subject to a restraining order, which include ERPOs and domestic violence protection orders. If the person fails the background check, they are prevented from purchasing the firearm.

CBI publishes annual data on the number of failed background checks and the reasons for the failure. In 2023, for example, 365 people subject to a restraining order sought to purchase a firearm. While CBI data does not provide clarification of the types of restraining orders, DV protection orders are one of the most common restraining orders. It is important to note that 25% of the DVF cases this year had DV protection orders in place at some point.

Based on available information, when someone, such as a DV victim, petitions for and is granted a DV protection order, the DV victim will rarely know if the restrained individual seeks to purchase a firearm. The failure to notify victims is painful because access to a firearm is a significant DVF risk factor. Of note, victims whose abusers own a firearm were six times more likely to be murdered than victims whose abusers do not own firearms.¹⁵ Historically, guns have overwhelmingly been a cause of DVFs. And this year, nearly three quarters of DVF victims were killed by a gun.

Those who sought a DV protection order through the civil court's system should be notified if their risk has increased dramatically. Washington state has a program that notifies victims in all of these instances through VINE – a system used by Colorado to keep victims updated about the custody status of defendants. VINE functions could easily be enhanced to notify victims when the PO was served and when it expires. This added level of notification is important because when a perpetrator is put on notice that a PO is in place, this is often a high-risk time for a victim. Consider that as noted above 25% of the 2023 DVF cases had an active PO at the time of the fatality.

¹⁵ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/jr000250e.pdf>

The Board recommends that Colorado implement an enhanced notification system to ensure that victims with DV protection orders are advised when DV protection orders are issued, served, and expire. The Board further recommends that victims be notified when subjects of DV protection orders attempt to unlawfully purchase a firearm.

Provide more protections to DV victims who are coerced or forced into creating debt

Economic abuse occurs when one intimate partner has control over the other partner's access to economic resources and opportunities and is designed to reinforce economic dependency or create economic instability through economic control, economic exploitation and economic sabotage. Research suggests this type of abuse occurs in 98% of abusive relationships.

Coerced debt is a form of economic abuse that occurs when an abuser utilizes coercive control or identity theft to incur debt in the name of an individual. Coerced debt can take a variety of forms ranging from abusers taking out credit cards in their victims' names without their knowledge, to forcing victims to obtain loans for the abuser's benefit, or even tricking victims into signing quitclaim deeds for a family home. Coerced debt often becomes a major obstacle for victims in leaving abusive relationships. Victims who attempt to leave the relationship encounter not only the traditional challenges, but also the increased difficulty of establishing financial self-sufficiency under the weight of coerced debt.

Some states have enacted laws to address coerced debt. The Board urges the Colorado General Assembly to recognize the economic impact of abuse on victims and survivors, and to consider legislation that provides protection for victims.

Improve mechanisms for the Board to receive robust data on DVFs

As detailed in pages 44-45, the Board conducts a thorough investigation to identify DVFs each year, but limitations in available data make the work and related analysis challenging and limited. The Board has worked on mechanisms to identify and analyze more robust data on prior years' DVFs. This year, the Board partnered with Bridge to Justice, a non-profit that provides legal representation to DV and sexual assault victims, to analyze the relationship between DVFs and the family court system as detailed in pages 44-45. This beneficial partnership revealed important findings that informed the Board's focus for 2025, underscoring the importance of such partnerships and will seek to systemize the Bridge to Justice partnership, and pursue others.

The Board is working more closely with CBI to help break down information silos and to collaborate on ways to better ensure access to robust data on each DVF. One example of the benefit of this initial collaboration is more complete information about the number of cases with active DV protection orders—a critical data point that has helped substantiate the Board's recommendation related to victim notification detailed above. Deepening this partnership will continue to improve the quality of the Board's work.

The Board recommends a continued focus on such partnerships and the cultivation of other mechanisms to ensure all DVFs are correctly identified and a full dataset on each fatality is generated.

Progress on Past Recommendations

Provide firearms relinquishment investigation support for limited pilot program in Colorado through the Colorado Bureau of Investigation

Status: *Continued*

Last year, the General Assembly increased CBI authority and funding to investigate firearms crimes. The Board believes this increased authority can help provide a meaningful step towards addressing the concerns raised by this Board related to firearm relinquishment. As the CBI continues to invest in this area, the Board has redirected its focus towards victim notification of attempted firearm purchases by those subject to a DV protection order as addressed on page 28.

Increase collaboration and partnership with the Maternal Mortality Prevention Program, the Child Fatality Review Board, and the Office of Suicide Prevention.

Status: *Closed*

The DOL and the Rose Adom Center met throughout the year with the Maternal Mortality Prevention Program, the Child Fatality Review Board, and the Child Fatality Review Board housed within CPS. While these meetings will continue, data sharing between agencies remains a challenge and the Board believes there are better avenues for collaboration to ensure that it identifies DVFs. The Rose Adom Center has created meaningful connections with both the Maternal Mortality Prevention and CFPS programs and looks forward to continued collaboration particularly on the risks to women during pregnancy.

Provide Increased and Sustainable Funding for the Board

Status: *Continued*

As detailed last year, the Board's mandate was expanded from primarily reporting on DVFs to reporting and implementation. However, the Board is provided with a limited appropriation from the General Assembly. This amount is insufficient to cover costs associated with the Board's reporting function. The Board remains committed making a meaningful impact within these constraints but still recommends allocating the required resources necessary to fully fulfill its mission.

Increase the use of risk assessment tools in organizations that work directly with domestic violence survivors

Status: *Continued*

This year, as noted above, the Board conducted a statewide survey to better understand how risk assessment tools were used by organizations that work directly with domestic violence survivors. This survey yielded several key findings. First, most advocacy groups surveyed used a form of a risk assessment and the “Danger Assessment” or a version thereof. Second, law enforcement agencies are increasing their use of LAP as a risk assessment tool, but the use of LAP is not yet ubiquitous. Third, other systems that have deep interactions with victims of domestic violence including judges, family law practitioners, and family court personnel do not typically use a risk assessment tool but believe such a tool could be very instructive and useful for them to better protect DV victims. The Board also had in-depth conversations with various stakeholders about where risk assessments could be the most beneficial and where the biggest mismatch is between the actual risk of the victim and understanding of the risk by stakeholders. Through this work, the Board identified concrete recommendations for this year’s report found on pages 46-51.

Acknowledgments

This report was authored by Keisha Sarpong, Fatality Review Program Manager at the Rose Andom Center, Dr. Joanne Belknap, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder, and Shalyn Kettering of the DOL.

Keisha has been working with the Board and DMDVFRT since 2022. She provides leadership to the Denver Metro Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team and has supported the work of developing DVFRTs across the state.

Joanne has served as the DMDVFRT's researcher since 1998. Her guidance as a researcher has helped Colorado receive national recognition for its DV Fatality Review work.

Shalyn Kettering manages the Board in her role as Legal Counsel to the Attorney General.

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Board Members

- City attorney's office in Colorado who has experience working with victims of domestic violence or prosecuting domestic violence offenders
 - **Linda Loflin-Pettit**, Manager of Government and Community Relations, Denver City Attorney's Office
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment:
 - **Christal Garcia**, Infant and Child Wellbeing Coordinator, Family Adversity and Mortality Section, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- Colorado District Attorneys' Council Designee
 - **Maggie Conboy**, Senior District Attorney, 5th Judicial District
- Criminal Defense Attorney:
 - **Tally Zuckerman**, Partner, Zuckerman Law, LLC
- Denver Metro Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee:
 - **Linda Johnston**, EAW Project Director, Colorado District Attorneys Council
- Department of Human Services' Adult Protection Services:
 - **Nicole Fisher**, Adult Protective Services Policy Specialist, Department of Human Services

- Department of Human Services' Child Protection Services:
 - **James Connell**, Intake and Assessment Administrator, Division of Child Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families
- Domestic Violence Survivor
 - **Bridget Dyson**, Survivor and Victim Advocate
 - **Erica Bethel**, Survivor and Victim Advocate
- Domestic violence advocate representing a shelter or other domestic violence service organizations:
 - **Carmen Lewis**, Executive Director, Rise Above Violence, Pagosa Springs
- Domestic violence offender management board:
 - **Jesse Hansen**, Domestic Violence Offender Management Board Program Coordinator, Colorado Department of Public Safety
- Domestic violence treatment provider specializing in offender treatment
 - **Lindsey Spraker**, Executive Director, Lifelong, Inc.
- Judge or magistrate:
 - **Judge Keri Yoder**, 7th Judicial District
- Law enforcement agency:
 - **Sandra Campanella**, Retired Law Enforcement and Principal, Campanella Consulting, LLC
- Medical professional with forensic experience:
 - **Megan L. Lechner**, Forensic Nurse Examiner, UCHealth Memorial Hospital (El Paso County)
- Probation, parole, or community corrections program
 - **Lindsey Dixon**, Pretrial Services Supervisor, Department of Public Safety, City and County of Denver
- Non-profit organization that offers training and expert advice to domestic violence programs that serve survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking:
 - **Ami Macarthy**: Director of Training, COVA
- AG Selected Appointee:
 - **Rudy Underwood**, Sergeant. Investigations Unit, Commerce City Police Department

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Resources

The Colorado Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board has compiled a list of local domestic violence resources professionals, survivors and champions of survivors may find helpful and can be utilized to strengthen Colorado's response to domestic abuse.

The Department of Law's Consumer Engagement and Data Services and Constituent Services teams field phone calls and written inquiries from the public. This team conducted statewide outreach to identify DV resources in all 64 counties in Colorado to ensure that when constituents call, they can be connected to reliable domestic violence resources.

If you or anyone you know is a victim of domestic violence or is in need of support services, there are organizations that can help.

If you are in a crisis or need immediate support, dial 911 or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE (7233), and for a comprehensive list of resources available throughout Colorado please visit [Violence Free Colorado](https://www.violencefreecolorado.org) at www.violencefreecolorado.org.