

## **Justice Department Selects Three Domestic Violence Courts to Serve as Resources to Specialized Courts Nationwide**

*Courts in Idaho, New York and Texas Will Offer Peer-to-Peer Support to Improve Responses to Domestic Violence*

The Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) today announced a new Mentor Court Initiative to support criminal and civil domestic violence courts across the country.

"Specialized domestic violence courts play a vital role in our efforts to end violence against women," said Bea Hanson, Acting Director of OVW. "Providing courts with the resources they need to safely and quickly intervene in cases of intimate partner violence not only saves lives, but sends a message to offenders that reducing domestic violence is a priority for our justice system."

OVW selected courts in Brooklyn, N.Y., Ada County, Idaho, and Dallas with years of experience honing strategies that enhance offender accountability and improve victim safety. These well-established programs will serve as role models and disseminate proven strategies. Each court will receive \$66,000 for a 24-month project.

Successful domestic violence courts process cases more efficiently, increase offender compliance, impose enhanced penalties, and achieve higher rates of conviction. There are now over 200 domestic violence courts in the United States. These courts require training and support, which is particularly effective when provided by peers.

As mentors, the three courts will share their expertise by hosting site visits and linking courts with peers facing similar challenges. They will help other domestic violence courts implement best practices, improve procedures, replicate relevant programming, and build the overall capacity of state court systems to respond effectively to these difficult cases.

The Mentor Court Initiative builds on OVW's commitment to strengthening the court response to domestic violence. Since 2010, OVW has awarded over \$10 million to court systems via the Court Training and Improvements Grant Program (Courts Program). The Courts Program supports judicial education and the specialized court planning and implementation integral to creating a collaborative and effective response to the crimes of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

The three courts chosen for the Mentor Court Initiative applied to an open solicitation and were reviewed based on the criteria set forth in the solicitation. The chosen courts are geographically diverse and have each developed and implemented different models that reflect the needs of their communities:

The Brooklyn Integrated Domestic Violence Court (IDV) hears misdemeanor criminal domestic violence cases as well as related family law and divorce cases in a high-volume urban setting. Since its inception in 2003, the Brooklyn IDV Court has disposed of over 19,000 cases involving 3,008 families in Kings County, NY, which has a population of 2.5 million. Located directly adjacent to the Brooklyn Family Justice Center, the Brooklyn IDV Court is able to work closely with the Kings County District Attorney's specialized domestic violence bureau and connect victims with 25 on-site government agencies and community-based organizations.

The Ada County Domestic Violence Court has responded to misdemeanor criminal domestic violence cases since 2006. Located in Boise, Idaho, the court handles more than 300 active cases a year, using intense supervised probation, post-sentence judicial monitoring, specialized offender assessment and treatment, and comprehensive case planning. Ada County's Domestic Violence Court will serve as an example for mid-size and rural communities that often face a distinct set of challenges when developing and operating specialized courts.

County Criminal Court #10 in Dallas was the first specialized domestic violence court in the state of Texas, opening in 1996. Dallas County is home to 2.4 million people, and includes diverse municipalities ranging from densely populated urban areas to smaller suburbs. County Criminal Court #10 focuses on high-risk offenders, assigning them to a separate probation docket with enhanced judicial monitoring and compliance. A strong partnership with the Department of Probation has increased supervision of these high-risk offenders.

OVW, a component of the U.S. Department of Justice, provides leadership in developing the nation's capacity to reduce violence against women through the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and subsequent legislation. Created in 1995, OVW administers financial and technical assistance to communities across the country that are developing programs, policies and practices aimed at ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. In addition to overseeing 22 federal grant programs, OVW often undertakes initiatives in response to special needs identified by communities facing acute challenges. More information is available at [www.ovw.usdoj.gov](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov).

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