

New Law Puts System in Place to Review Domestic Violence Fatalities

Thanks to the collaboration of Representative Maurice West II, Senator Celina Villanueva, and several advocacy groups and supporters, Illinois has joined 45 other states and many countries in implementing a process to study deaths resulting from domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Fatality Review Act (Public Act 102-0520) was signed into law last August and creates a process to establish domestic violence fatality review (DVFR) teams across the State.

Generally, fatality review is the use of a multi-disciplinary team to study events, records, and systems that may be relevant leading up to a person's death. Fatality review teams commonly exist to study areas like child, elderly, hospital, aviation and more recently, fatalities related to the opioid epidemic. The goal is to look at system vulnerabilities that lead to adverse outcomes for survivors, victims, and their families, provide recommendations, and implement changes.

As noted in the legislation, domestic violence-related homicides occurred across at least 26 counties between July 2019 and June 2020, though domestic violence incidents are often under reported and the full scope is not well-known. It is well-known, however, that domestic violence is experienced and responded to differently in historically marginalized communities where there are many barriers to accessing interventions.

The new law establishes fatality review teams in judicial districts around the state to conduct comprehensive reviews of fatalities and near-fatalities linked to domestic violence. These in-depth reviews will look at various systems, collect and review records, and conduct interviews. Because an effective response for victims and survivors requires a variety of governmental, social and community services and supports, reviewing cases from various angles can help to identify areas of breakdown between these entities.

The teams will report their data and findings to the 35-member Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee. The Committee will review and analyze the data for trends in strengths and vulnerabilities and make recommendations for systems change. The Statewide Committee will establish the regional teams and provide leadership, support and technical assistance to them while they carry out their duties. The overall goal is to improve community and systemic responses and strengthen interventions across the State in an effort to reduce domestic violence fatalities.

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The Statewide DVFR Committee met in January and March of this year and will continue to meet quarterly. ICADV will house the Office of Fatality Review, Director and staff. Meetings are open to the public but will be closed for executive session when it may be necessary to discuss confidential or identifying information. The Committee will publish annual and biennial reports detailing their progress and recommendations. It is important to note that the goal is not to find fault or assign blame to any person or entity but rather to work collaboratively to strengthen interventions, identify and address service and societal barriers, and prevent domestic violence fatalities.

Public Act 102-0520, SB0685 [10200SB0685enr \(ilga.gov\)](http://ilga.gov)

Effective August 20, 2020

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