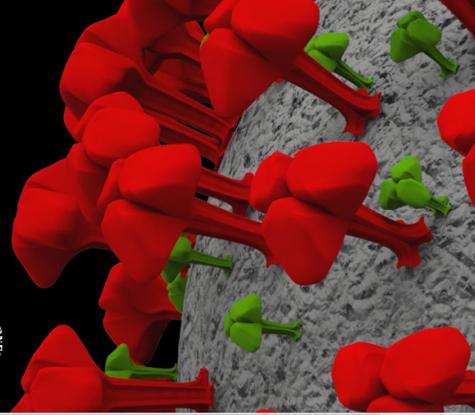


COVID-19

Lessons Learned from the Field: Maintaining Victim Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic



On December 10, 2020, CNA and the National District Attorneys Association brought you a **virtual discussion** featuring District Attorney Hillar Moore, Assistant District Attorney Melanie S. Fields, and Victim Advocate Suzanne Hamilton of the East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office (EBRDA). Panelists discussed the steps they have taken to ensure that victims of crime, specifically domestic violence, have access to victim services and how their office has been able to remain connected with victims of crime during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document compiles the resources mentioned during this discussion.

FOLLOW-UP RESOURCES

- In an effort to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, East Baton Rouge Parish **reduced its jail population** at the onset of the pandemic.
- Baton Rouge Police Department began utilizing **QR codes** to initiate video calls with police officers.
- EBRDA wrote a paper entitled "**The New Normal**" outlining the office's response to the pandemic.
- EBRDA took proactive steps to ensure that the community knew **how to access** its services during the pandemic.
- EBRDA Victim Services developed the **EBRDA from Home Video Series** to let the community know that its victim advocates were continuing to provide services.
- EBRDA shared information on its **Stop the Loss Initiative**, a collaborative approach to reducing domestic violence.
- East Baton Rouge Parish received a grant to open **The Capital Area Family Justice Center**, which provides domestic violence resource to victims.
- EBRDA **prioritized domestic violence** when the time came for its first jury trial during the COVID-19 pandemic, in August, trying and convicting a man of the second degree murder of his girlfriend.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

Our panelists answered the following questions during the virtual discussion. To access a recording of the virtual discussion, please click this [link](#).

- Did EBRDA try an initiative that failed, and were there any lessons learned from that failure?
- How is EBRDA keeping victims engaged and understanding of the delays due to COVID-19?
- How is EBRDA providing resources to victims when services are shut down and staff is limited due to the pandemic?
- How is EBRDA handling standard procedures with victims, such as internal meetings with victims, victim impact statements, and victims attending court?

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- How is EBRDA working with victims to prepare them to testify?
- Has EBRDA developed a new protocol/policy for in-court accompaniment of victims?
- Are there strategies EBRDA has been employing for maintaining proper distance while trying to console victims and maintain discretion?
- How is EBRDA getting time-sensitive resources to victims who do not have or use email?
- How is EBRDA handling situations where the courts are not allowing victims into the courtroom because of limited space?
- How has EBRDA aided victims needing protection or needing to file for a protective order during the pandemic, particularly in severe cases when needing to vacate?
- Has EBRDA encountered a situation where there are individuals who do not believe the pandemic is real? If so, how did it explain the new procedures to victims?
- Has EBRDA had to deal with prisoners being provided an early release due to the pandemic? If so, how has the office explained that to victims?
- How did EBRDA deal with jurors being afraid to come to court? Did the office find that the jury pool was not big enough?
- Have EBRDA prosecutors used any alternative plea deals to avoid trials and/or to move cases along? If so, how have victims responded?
- Has EBRDA had out-of-state victims or witnesses travel to the jurisdiction for trial testimony? If so, how did that go?
- What steps did EBRDA take to keep victims safe during the trial process?
- Has EBRDA had problems with victims coming to court for their cases and the sheriff's department refusing to transport prisoners?
- Does EBRDA have a victim's compensation fund/program?

FOR QUESTIONS, CONTACT US AT COVID19_COURTS@CNA.ORG.