

Domestic Violence Issues

District Attorneys' (DA) offices across Colorado are using data dashboards to explore and act on issues related to domestic violence (DV). This handout provides two stories of how judicial districts (JDs) have used this data to drive change within their offices.

OFFICE PRIORITY: ADDRESS DV CASES

One office identified a goal to **seek a better understanding of case outcomes for Victim Rights Act (VRA) cases**, with a focus on DV cases. They wanted to ensure that cases were resolved in a timely manner and that appropriate convictions were secured. This is important to:

- Ensure that **victims feel supported** and remain engaged in the case.
- Support **public safety** by preventing the escalation of violent behavior.
- Ensure that **resources are being used wisely** in their office and within the court system as a whole.
- **Build better relationships** with justice system partners, including law enforcement and public defenders.

DIGGING DEEPER: Data Dashboard

The office used their data dashboard to dig deeper into VRA cases. Below are some strategies for how to use your data to investigate:

- **How cases are being resolved.**

Explore the Case Resolution page, with a focus on VRA and DV cases, to see how these types of cases are being resolved. Support discussion within your office to determine: are these the types of outcomes that we want?

Assess what differences in dispositions exist between county and district court, how dispositions have changed over time, and what kinds of cases are being dismissed and receiving deferred judgments. Apply filters such as charge level, defendant gender, and defendant criminal history to determine if certain kinds of cases are resolved differently. For example, are certain types of cases dismissed more frequently than others?

- **How long it is taking to resolve cases.**

Explore the Timeliness page, with a focus on VRA and DV cases, to see how long it takes for these types of cases to be resolved. Apply filters for different types of case resolutions to see how long it takes for cases to be dismissed. Support discussion within your office to identify what might be driving case resolution time.

DIGGING DEEPER: Collecting Additional Information

- After exploring the dashboard, the office identified the need to collect additional data about **why cases are being dismissed** using the dismissal reason codes. As an office, they came to a consensus about who would enter dismissal codes and trained staff on how to use the codes. They plan to regularly audit the data to ensure that the codes are being used as intended.

POSSIBLE ACTION

- **The office formed an internal workgroup**, which included a chief deputy DA, a legal assistant, and a data analyst to examine dismissals from many different perspectives.
- The office created a **domestic violence team** consisting of a deputy DA, investigator, and advocate. The goals of the team are to address dismissals, evaluate recidivism, develop an environment for victims to meaningfully participate in the case, and enhance communication among agency partners to provide support for victims.

PROBLEM: TOO MANY FEMALE DV CASES

Another office noticed they seemed to be **filing and dismissing a lot of DV cases with female defendants**. They wanted to address this issue to ensure the right person is arrested in DV situations and that Colorado's mandatory arrest law is being applied as intended.

As a first step, they explored their internal dashboard to examine **trends in case filings and case outcomes**. To develop benchmarks, they **compared their data with other jurisdictions in Colorado**, where they saw similar trends, as well as **national data**, which suggested that Colorado had higher rates of cases being filed against female defendants.

DIGGING DEEPER: Data Dashboard

The office used their data dashboard to dig deeper into DV cases with female defendants. Below are some strategies for how to use your data to investigate:

- **How filing for DV cases has changed over time.**
Examine the Charging and Filing page and apply filters such as charge level and the DV flag to determine how many DV cases are being filed, how this has changed over time, and whether there are other common defendant characteristics for these cases, such as criminal history.
- **Where cases are coming from.**
Examine the Charging and Filing page and filter by referral agency to identify which law enforcement agencies are referring the most DV cases with female defendants.
- **If similar issues are seen with other crimes.**
Examine the Charging and Filing page to explore whether female defendants are disproportionality represented for other types of crimes. Explore different types of DV associated filings, including hands-on DV crimes and property DV crimes.
- **How cases are being resolved.**
Examine the Case Resolution page to see how DV cases with female defendants are resolved, with a focus on dismissals, and how this has changed over time.

DIGGING DEEPER: Case Studies

- The office then identified the need to better understand the circumstances surrounding cases filed and dismissed against female DV defendants, so they decided to **dig deeper into specific case examples**. They reviewed officer statements to determine whether there were opportunities for officers to investigate any prior DV complaints or the possibility of self-defense.
- This review helped illustrate the rationale for the DA office in dismissing the case and surfaced potential opportunities to **engage with law enforcement**.

POSSIBLE ACTION

- The office created an officer training program to **educate law enforcement** about DV cases, the mandatory arrest law, and how the law should be used. The training presents aggregate data to illustrate the overall magnitude of the problem, as well as data from case studies to illustrate the nuances of specific cases. The training provides guidance on what is considered a crime and what is considered self-defense in DV situations. The office plans to examine the impact of these trainings by exploring changes in case filings.
- Given that this trend is present across the state, consider whether **state-level action** is needed, such as modifications to Colorado's statewide mandatory arrest law.

