



# **Pinellas County Domestic Violence** **Task Force 2016** **Recommendations**

## **Law Enforcement:**

### **The Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force Recommends:**

- 1. The four largest police departments and Sheriff's Office designate domestic violence law enforcement officer/deputy positions to exclusively work domestic violence cases.**
- 2. All local law enforcement agencies receive ongoing, in-person domestic violence training.**
- 3. The four largest police departments and Sheriff's Office hire more victim advocates.**
- 4. Sheriff's Office re-implement a process to enforce judicial no contact orders by preventing jail visitation between the involved parties in domestic and dating violence cases.**

Currently in Pinellas County, there are no specific domestic violence officers/deputies. With 21,169 domestic related calls for service in 2016 and the serious nature of these crimes, a domestic violence officer/deputy is crucial. The following jurisdictions have domestic violence detectives (this is not an exhaustive list): Pasco County, Polk County, Melbourne, Davie, Citrus County, Orlando, Orange County, and Palm Beach County.

Ongoing in-person training is imperative for law enforcement. Currently most training is online or by video which can be out dated and ineffective.

Victim Advocates are essential to helping domestic violence victims. Many positions were lost during the recession. Although budgets have increased, the number of advocate positions has remained stagnant.

## State Attorney's Office:

**The Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force recommends the State Attorney's Office:**

- 1. Create a full-time victim advocate position for the misdemeanor domestic violence unit (R).**
- 2. Create an additional assistant state attorney position for the misdemeanor domestic violence unit (R).**
- 3. Provide ongoing domestic violence related training opportunities for all assistant state attorneys.**
- 4. Assign one supervisor to review all felony domestic violence filing decisions.**
- 5. Implement and consistently follow a pro-prosecution, evidence-based policy.**
- 6. Create a felony domestic violence unit with experienced attorneys and a judge that is well educated about domestic violence.**

Successful and effective prosecution of domestic violence cases requires appropriate staffing, supervision, support services, and ongoing training. Ensuring victim safety and holding abusers/perpetrators accountable requires an understanding of the dynamics and tactics of domestic violence, recognition of the impact of victimization, extra care/attention, and time. The current caseload in the misdemeanor domestic violence unit dictates the need for an additional assistant state attorney and a dedicated victim advocate/assistant position. Similarly, ongoing training related to domestic violence, batterers intervention versus anger management as a condition of sentences, and the merits of a pro-prosecution policy is imperative for all assistant state attorneys.

An evidence-based pro-prosecution policy is the law (Florida Statute 741.290(2)). Prosecutors should proceed over the objection of the victim if the evidence demonstrates a crime occurred. In addition, the creation of a domestic violence supervisor for felony cases provides expertise, consistency, and guidance to ensure victim safety and abuser/perpetrator accountability. A combined misdemeanor and felony division is considered best practice nationwide. Implementation of the above recommendations will improve the prosecution rate and make Pinellas County safer.

## Batterers Intervention Program and the Courts:

### The Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force recommends:

- 1. Assistant state attorneys consistently recommend a minimum 26 Week Batterers Intervention Program (BIP) in court for intimate partner cases.**
- 2. Misdemeanor and felony probation begin tracking BIP orders and completion in domestic related cases.**
- 3. The Judiciary utilize the BIP versus Anger Management comparison chart to increase BIP referrals in appropriate cases (see attachment).**

BIP is an excellent opportunity for abusers/perpetrators to be held accountable and to learn strategies for changing violent behavior. Ordering BIP is a crucial element in addressing an injunction for protection or criminal case. The legislature reinforced this point by codifying conditions for mandatory 26 weeks BIP attendance and length of the program into statute [741.30(6)(a)(5); 741.281; 741.325]. Shorter programs have been found to be ineffective in changing violent behavior,<sup>1</sup> and in some cases can make violent behavior worse. Similarly, Anger Management is never an appropriate treatment for batterers, as it fails to address the underlying causes of intimate partner violence and it too can cause domestic violence to escalate.<sup>2, 3</sup>

Currently there is no standardized, consistent, and reliable method of obtaining the number of Batterers Intervention Program (BIP) orders by the criminal courts (with the exception of the Domestic Violence Diversion Program (DVP), a program within the State Attorney's Office). Holding abusers/perpetrators accountable requires tracking and monitoring. It is impossible for our community to assess BIP referrals and completion without the data being collected by entities within the system.

#### Sources

<sup>1</sup> Davis, R. C., Taylor, B. G., & Maxwell, C. D. (1998). Does batterer treatment reduce violence? A randomized experiment in Brooklyn. *Justice Quarterly*, 18, 171 – 201)

<sup>2</sup> "Countering Confusion about the Duluth Model" by Michael Paymar and Graham Barnes, Research Specialists with the Battered Women's Justice Project, a program of Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs

<sup>3</sup> "Offenders' anger control classes help make some more dangerous." *Guardian* (London) April 2006