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Domestic Violence Prevention Efforts in D.C. Show Significant Improvements

New report shows D.C.'s practices align with national guidance and practices in many other jurisdictions

WASHINGTON, July 16, 2019—The Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board has made considerable strides in improving the District of Columbia's responsiveness and preventing future fatalities, according to a new report by the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA).

Most notably, the ODCA report found that the Board's operations were generally in alignment with guidance provided by the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative, a resource center dedicated to domestic violence fatality review and funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, a branch of the U.S. Department of Justice, including that:

- The District has a strong enabling statute for Board operations and is currently supported by a dedicated Coordinator, which is not the case in many jurisdictions.
- The enabling legislation also provides great latitude and authority of the Board to gather information for effective case reviews
- The Board has established operating rules and procedures and is working towards consistently producing annual reports.

In January 2017, the Board adopted operating rules and procedures relating to the review of fatalities, including the identification of cases and coordination among the professionals involved, and procedures on how the Board addresses confidentiality, conflicts of interest, meeting requirements, and the request of case documents.

The D.C. Code requires the Board to report on its recommendations and to document in its annual reports the steps taken to implement them. Of the 11 distinct recommendations made by the Board since 2007, nine recommendations have been implemented, including one that led to a three-year, city-wide public domestic violence education campaign and another that resulted in partnering with the religious community on methods of identification and prevention of domestic abuse.

The toll of domestic violence in D.C.

- An estimated 104,000 female District residents have been hit, slapped, punched, threatened, beaten, stalked, or raped by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- There were 17 domestic violence fatalities in 2016, 15 in 2017, and 12 in 2018.
- Twelve children died as a result of domestic violence between 2012 and 2018.
- There were 19,527 domestic violence assault calls for service received in 2016 and 2017.

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One of the report's findings showed that the Board has not consistently prepared annual reports on its findings and recommendations. While under OCME, the Board issued three annual reports which provided a high-level statistical summary of 85 domestic violence fatalities that met the criteria for review. While these three reports were publicly released, the Board did not publish reports between 2010 and 2015, which means the Board was not in full compliance with the law while under OCME.

This also resulted in 71 cases that occurred between 2010 and 2013 not being reviewed. Because these in-depth reviews were not conducted, the District missed opportunities for valuable recommendations on ways to reduce the number of deaths resulting from domestic violence. The Board spent time during 2017 and 2018 reviewing domestic violence fatalities that occurred in 2014 and compiling their first annual report under OSVJG. The ODCA report recommends that the Board continues to review domestic violence fatalities and produce annual reports as required. A second report under the OVSJG covering 2015 fatalities was published while this report was in draft.

Other ODCA recommendations are:

- The Board Coordinator should develop a standardized information request system.
- The Board Coordinator should incorporate in the current case summary form a method to detail dates of requests and compliance with these requests and a system to track this information.
- The Board should work to eliminate the four-year-lag in reporting by reviewing and reporting on more than one year of data in their upcoming reports.
- OVSJG should perform an annual staffing assessment and ensure that there is adequate funding for a dedicated Coordinator.

The Board is composed of nine governmental entities appointed by the Mayor; six federal, judicial, and private agencies or entities with domestic violence expertise either appointed by the Mayor or at the Mayor's request; and eight community representatives (non-D.C. government employees), appointed by the Mayor, with the advice and consent of the Council of the District of Columbia (D.C. Council).

[Read the report.](#)

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