



DCF COVID-19 Daily Update Supporting Children, Families and Staff April 27, 2020

ONLINE RESTRAINING ORDER APPLICATIONS ANOTHER SUPPORT TO FAMILIES

The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCDAV) and its CTSafeConnect program began assisting with online restraining order applications after the Judicial Branch put a new temporary process in place. The CTSafeConnect program helps victims of intimate partner violence (also called domestic violence) obtain restraining orders and other needed services, including safety plans.

The Judicial Branch established the online application process as a direct response to COVID-19, which led to the closure of some courts and the limited operating schedule of others. Liza Andrews, CCADV's communication director, said, the expectation is that the process will be temporary, although CTSafeConnect will always be available to assist and support victims.

CCDAV legal directors Marcia Keegan and GERALYN O'Neil-Wild said "CTSafeConnect," which is staffed by trained and experienced advocates, is the best way for a victim to access a restraining order for several reasons:

- The advocates know how to effectively use the online system for applying for a restraining order to get the best result for the victim;
- The advocates can talk to the victim to see if the restraining order is appropriate and safe in the specific circumstance;
- CTSafeConnect will work with the victim to create and implement a safety plan to keep the victim and any children safe; and
- CTSafeConnect will help the victim obtain services from the local domestic violence agency, prepare the victim for court hearings, and have the abuser served with court papers.

Victims are invited to call 888-774-2900 or visit www.CTSafeConnect.com.

Ms. Keegan and Ms. O'Neil-Wild said applying for restraining orders is not always the best thing for all victims. For example, if the application results in a hearing -- and not an immediate restraining order -- the perpetrator would be served with a hearing notice while in the same home as the victim.

"Restraining orders are not always the answer," said Ms. Keegan. "It can put the victim in more danger. If you have a victim and abuser in the same home, it can be a very unsafe time."

Ms. O'Neil-Wild said the CTSafeConnect advocates know whether a victim's application is sufficient to result in the temporary restraining order that will keep the victim safe and also how to file it so that it does.

There are alternatives to a restraining order that may be better suited to the victim. "The training and experience of our advocates can help the victim see the range of options available," Ms. Keegan said. "We talk through what it is you are trying to achieve, and we may find that there are better alternatives. Maybe it's calling the police. Or maybe the victim should go to a shelter or access other services to help meet basic needs for the family."

For all these reasons, the two legal directors said, it is best that the victim work through CTSafeConnect and not try to file for the restraining order directly themselves or even with other helpers including a Department social worker.

Ms. O'Neil-Wild said, "We believe doing it with our coordinators is best" because of all the other supports CCDAV provides, including arranging with marshals to serve court papers and preparing the victim for the hearing.

"There is so much more to the restraining order process than just filing it," Ms. Keegan said.

The phone number is answered by a certified domestic violence counselor 24 hours a day and seven days a week. All services are confidential, safe, free and voluntary.

"We want what is best for the victim," said Ms. Keegan. "We really listen to what the victim wants. With our training, we are in the position to listen to what they want and help them achieve their goal safely."