



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

TO: Members of the Connecticut Criminal Justice Commission

FROM: Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

DATE: October 10, 2019

RE: Connecticut's Next Chief State's Attorney

CCADV appreciates the opportunity to offer input and support to the Criminal Justice Commission regarding the appointment of Connecticut's next Chief State's Attorney.

Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those organizations that serve them. We are a membership organization of Connecticut's 18 domestic violence service agencies that provide critical support to victims including counseling, support groups, emergency shelter, court advocacy, safety planning, and lethality assessment, among other services. Founded in 1978, CCADV works closely with our membership to understand and respond to the on-going needs of domestic violence victims and their families. CCADV also works to change social conditions through policy, advocacy, public awareness and community education. We advocate at a national and state level to create and implement strategic policies that will improve Connecticut's response to domestic violence.

In 1986, Connecticut enacted the Family Violence Prevention and Response Act. This law defined family violence, gave police officers and courts directions on handling family violence cases, and required the Judicial Department to maintain family violence intervention units (FVIU) in each of its geographical areas. These units are coordinated and governed by a formal agreement between the chief state's attorney and the judicial department. The purpose of the unit is to determine and then coordinate an appropriate judicial response that holds the offender accountable and ensures victim safety. This includes the arrangement for services to victims through the family violence victim advocates. These services include guiding victims through the court process, advocating on behalf of victims in court and working with victims to enhance and implement their safety plans.

In 1996, the first specialized docket to hear criminal cases involving domestic violence separately from other criminal cases was established in Bridgeport with the goal of enhancing victim safety, holding offenders accountable through vertical case management, and providing a team coordinated approach to services and ongoing meaningful judicial oversight. These specialized domestic violence dockets demonstrated the importance of consistency not only in addressing offender behavior and recidivism but also in having dedicated staff with specialized training.

Since 2012, CCADV in collaboration with the Division of Criminal Justice Office of the Chief State's Attorney launched a Domestic Violence Roundtable which brings together prosecutors, victim advocates, and recently in the last year joining the group Court Support Service Family Relations. The goal of the Domestic Violence Roundtable is to "better serve the domestic violence victim and improve the administration of justice throughout the State." The Roundtable provides an opportunity to strengthen communication and collaboration among prosecutors, family services and family violence victim advocates on a statewide level.

The group has meet numerous times over the years holding regular meetings and joint trainings which have also been opened to included law enforcement.

Over the years, there has been a gradual but cumulatively significant shift away from support and recognition of the many benefits of a specialized prosecution response to domestic violence including the effectiveness of the dedicated domestic violence dockets. This can be due to a wide range of reasons such as a lack of resources, budget cuts, staff turnover, leadership priorities, and new criminal justice initiatives.

It is CCADV's hope that Connecticut's next Chief State's Attorney will actively and aggressively renew Connecticut's commitment to victim safety and offender accountability. Given the fact that 1/3 of all criminal court cases are domestic violence cases, it is imperative that there be an **equivalent amount** of state resources and leadership support available to effectively and expeditiously adjudicate family violence cases and respond to the needs of victims, their families and the community in a meaningful way.

CCADV looks forward to the Office of the Chief State's Attorney:

- strengthening a specialized prosecution response to domestic violence within the criminal court system;
- reviving and enhancing a coordinated multidisciplinary community response via the Family Violence Intervention Units and dedicated DV dockets;
- support of the Domestic Violence Offender Program Standards Advisory Council including efforts to expand the approved provider list; and
- support of the Domestic Violence Roundtable – its mission and recommendations.

Again, we appreciate this opportunity to provide input as to what has worked well and opportunities to strengthen our work collectively. We look forward to continuing to partner with the Division of Criminal Justice Office and Connecticut's next Chief State's Attorney.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or for more information.

Karen Jarmoc, MA
Chief Executive Officer
kjarmoc@ctcadv.org
959.202.5001

Geralyn O'Neil-Wild
Director of Legal Advocacy
gwild@ctcadv.org
959.202.5018