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New data show wide variation in intimate partner violence results at MD courts

A new analysis of state court data released today by the non-profit group Court Watch Montgomery indicates that although all Maryland courts operate under the same domestic violence laws, courts in Maryland's 24 counties granted, denied, and dismissed final protective orders at dramatically different rates in 2013.

Over 30,000 Maryland residents are victims of domestic violence every year. The new analysis examines data from the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts that summarizes all 17,484 final protective order hearings in both District and Circuit Courts in Maryland during 2013. The report shows, for example, that victims' requests for final protective orders were denied *more than eight times as often* in the county with the highest denial rate than in the county with the lowest rate.

The analysis also finds that Maryland judges chose to mandate key remedies available under domestic violence laws in only a small percentage of cases, despite the demonstrated benefits of those remedies for victim safety. For example:

- Emergency Family Maintenance (EFM, essentially emergency child support) is often essential for an abuse victim to remain independent of her abuser; yet judges granted EFM in only 20% of final protective orders in which custody was determined by the court.
- Judges ordered fewer than 10% of domestic violence offenders state-wide to offender education programs that are designed to help reduce abuse recidivism.
- Although domestic violence can result in serious harm to the children in abusive relationships, judges ordered "supervised visitation" in fewer than 8% of final protective orders that explicitly addressed custody.

"The large disparities in these data raise important questions about whether domestic violence laws are being equitably applied state-wide; and the low application of domestic violence remedies suggest our courts can do much more to protect the victims of domestic violence," said Laurie Duker, Executive Director of Court Watch Montgomery. "When Maryland courts grant protective orders without providing emergency financial assistance, or treatment for the offender, or provisions to protect victims' children, then victims are exposed to unnecessary risk, and may be more likely to find themselves under unbearable pressure to return to their abuser."

The appendix to this press release provides rankings for all 24 Maryland counties on the rates at which

state courts in those counties granted, denied, and dismissed requests for final protective orders. These data show that:

- On average, counties granted 42% of final protective orders, which provide victims with legal protection (such as “no contact”) from their abuser for a full year. Yet rates at which final orders were granted varied, from only 35% in Baltimore City to 62% in Somerset County.
- There was even wider variation in *denial* of protective orders. Courts denied 15% of final orders on average, state-wide. Yet while District and Circuit Court judges in Somerset County denied final protective orders only 3% of the time, judges in Caroline County – using the same legal standard – denied a full 26% of all final protective orders requested by victims.
- A full 43% of orders were dismissed state-wide, usually when a victim either did not return to court for a hearing or asked a judge to drop their case. Such dismissals can be a sign that the victim does not feel safe pursuing her request for protection (although there can be other reasons for dismissal). Baltimore City led the state in the percentage of domestic violence cases dismissed (53%). In Talbot County only 26% of orders were dismissed.
- Baltimore County had one of the lowest rates of granting orders as well as above average denial and dismissal rates.

Court Watch Montgomery is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that works to make domestic violence victims and their children safer by reducing obstacles to effective legal protection and holding offenders accountable. Court Watch’s 40 volunteers have observed and collected data at over 3,000 protective and peace order hearings since 2011.

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APPENDIX: COUNTY RATES AND RANKINGS ON PROTECTIVE ORDERS GRANTED, DISMISSED, DENIED

% OF FINAL PROTECTIVE ORDERS GRANTED (Lowest to highest) (State ave. = 42%)	% OF FINAL PROTECTIVE ORDERS DENIED (Highest to lowest) (State ave. = 15%)	% OF FINAL PROTECTIVE ORDERS DISMISSED (Highest to lowest) (State ave. = 43%)	PROTECTIVE ORDERS GRANTED PER CAPITA (Per 10,000 people) (Lowest to highest)
Baltimore City (35%)*	Queen Anne's (26%)	Baltimore City (53%)	Howard (7)
Baltimore Cnty (35%)*	Caroline (26%)	Wicomico (46%)	Montgomery (12)
Allegany (35%)	Howard (24%)	Baltimore Cnty (46%)	Queen Anne's (12)
Washington (37%)	Kent (24%)	Anne Arundel (46%)	Garrett (13)
Queen Anne's (38%)	Allegany (23%)	Washington (45%)	Kent (13)
Anne Arundel (40%)	Calvert (22%)	Harford (45%)	Baltimore Cnty (13)
Worcester (40%)*	Garrett (21%)	Cecil (43%)	Allegany (14)
Wicomico (41%)*	Talbot (21%)	Worcester (43%)	Frederick (14)
Howard (41%)	Baltimore Cnty (19%)	Prince George's (43%)	Harford (14)
Cecil (41%)	Dorchester (19%)	Saint Mary's (42%)	Talbot (14)
Calvert (42%)	Washington (18%)	Allegany (42%)	Worcester (14)
Prince George's (43%)	Worcester (17%)	Carroll (38%)	Anne Arundel (14)
Dorchester (45%)	Montgomery (16%)	Charles (37%)	Carroll (15)
Charles (47%)	Charles (16%)	Queen Anne's (37%)	Wicomico (15)
Carroll (48%)	Cecil (15%)	Dorchester (36%)	Calvert (16)
Garrett (48%)	Anne Arundel (15%)	Calvert (36%)	Cecil (18)
Harford (48%)	Frederick (15%)	Somerset (35%)	Baltimore City (20)
Saint Mary's (49%)*	Prince George's (15%)	Frederick (35%)	Washington (20)
Caroline (49%)	Carroll (14%)	Howard (35%)	Somerset (21)
Kent (50%)	Wicomico (12%)	Garrett (31%)	Saint Mary's (22)
Frederick (50%)	Baltimore City (12%)	Montgomery (30%)	Prince George's (23)
Montgomery (54%)	Saint Mary's (9%)	Kent (26%)	Dorchester (24)
Talbot (56%)	Harford (7%)	Caroline (26%)	Charles (25)
Somerset (62%)	Somerset (3%)	Talbot (26%)	Caroline (26)

* MD counties with the highest per capita domestic violence crime rates, 2010 Uniform Crime Report

Source: Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts