



## **Intimate Partner Violence and the Montgomery County Courts during the COVID Pandemic**

**MISSION:** Court Watch Montgomery aims to ensure that all survivors of intimate partner violence in Montgomery County and throughout Maryland have access to responsive justice and vital services that will stop abuse quickly and permanently. To achieve this goal, we monitor and collect data on court hearings, recommend changes to improve policy and practice, and hold judges and court personnel accountable for providing a safe and respectful court environment.

This report was prepared by CWM Board Member Karen Spar, with analysis of CWM data by Data Manager and Analyst Sarah Stephens. Deep appreciation goes to Sarah Stephens, Volunteer Coordinator Amy Kass, former Executive Director Carolyn Hoffmann and the dedicated volunteers who worked tirelessly to pursue the mission of CWM during challenging times

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# Intimate Partner Violence and the Montgomery County Courts during the COVID Pandemic

## Introduction

The COVID pandemic and early stay-at-home orders sparked alarm about a potential “pandemic within a pandemic” or “shadow pandemic” of increased violence among family members and intimate partners. Concern was heightened when courts were closed, certain hearings were suspended or made virtual and access to justice required access to technology. Court Watch Montgomery (CWM) monitors court proceedings that are intended to ensure safety and justice for survivors. COVID posed a fundamental challenge: how to watch the courts when the courts are closed.

CWM is the only organization in Maryland that collects and analyzes data about what is actually happening in domestic violence hearings, through the efforts of trained volunteers who traditionally are physically present in the courtroom. Since 2011, CWM volunteers have collected data on more than 10,000 civil and criminal hearings.

This report discusses some nationwide and local information on what is known about the impact of COVID on intimate partner violence (IPV).<sup>1</sup> It then describes the experience of CWM in remotely monitoring IPV hearings in Montgomery County District Court, after COVID made in-person monitoring either impossible or highly challenging and presents limited findings from the data collected.

### Summary:

- Nearly two years into the pandemic, its impact on IPV is not fully known. Varying studies reviewed for this report indicate an early spike but differ on when the increase occurred, and likely understate the actual number of incidents because of victims’ reluctance to report. Some research suggests that violence grew more severe during the pandemic.
- Maryland saw a sizeable increase from 2019 to 2020 in a one-day census of adults and children served in domestic violence programs statewide, although nationally, the count was largely unchanged. Maryland also saw a 93% rise in IPV-related shooting homicides between 2019 and 2020. Montgomery County reports no sustained increase in IPV since COVID but community stakeholders caution that a lack of reporting makes it impossible to know the true number of incidents. Abuse appears to have grown more severe in the County, with a rise in reported strangulations.

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<sup>1</sup> “Domestic violence” is often used broadly (and in Maryland law) to describe violence among family or household members, as well as between intimate partners. Court Watch Montgomery focuses solely on “intimate partner violence” (IPV) or abuse between current or former consensual romantic partners (see **Appendix**). This report uses both terms, depending on the terms used by cited materials or organizations.

- Closing Maryland courtrooms to the public hampered the ability of CWM to monitor and collect data on IPV hearings. Criminal cases were delayed and all hearings, including for domestic violence protective orders, initially moved to virtual formats. Even after courtrooms reopened, public access was largely only by remote means. Despite challenges, 20 volunteers were able to remotely monitor by audio stream and collected data on 128 criminal hearings during December 2020-May 2021 and 82 protective order hearings during March-May 2021.
- Preliminary findings from these limited data must be considered highly tentative but may be worth noting:
  - Outcomes of remotely monitored criminal hearings during COVID showed a small decrease in trials and a small increase in the share of cases where criminal charges were dropped, compared with pre-COVID hearings. Outcomes of remotely monitored protective order hearings showed a small increase in temporary orders granted and a corresponding decrease in petitions dismissed.
  - Attorney presence at remotely monitored protective order hearings was significantly less than during pre-COVID hearings. Relatedly, the County Council Office of Legislative Oversight has reported that victim advocates were unable to accompany petitioners at hearings during parts of the pandemic. Because victim advocates do not routinely speak at hearings, CWM was unable to monitor their presence with audio-only access.
- A few issues can be highlighted based on the experience of the past two years. The need for remote access to hearings, for the public as well as survivors of IPV, will likely continue. However, the impact of remote access on representation by attorneys and victim advocates may be a concern. And finally, not enough is known about the impact of COVID on IPV in general or specifically on domestic violence court. Impartial court monitoring programs such as CWM enable the public to understand what survivors experience in court and identify trends and anomalies that might otherwise go unseen. As the pandemic continues to impact the lives of survivors, we are eager to return to full-scale monitoring and reporting our detailed findings to the courts and the public.

### **What is Known About the Impact of COVID on IPV?**

National data on the prevalence of IPV in the wake of COVID largely reflect the early phase of the pandemic and the impact of mandatory lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. Research reviewed for this report on the prevalence of IPV include:

- studies of change in the number of reported incidents in multiple U.S. jurisdictions, largely based on police or sheriffs' data (Hsu and Henke, 2020; Leslie and Wilson, 2020; Miller, Segal, and Spencer, 2021; Nix and Richards, forthcoming);

- national data on numbers of contacts made to domestic violence hotlines or people served at domestic violence programs (National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2020; National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2020 and 2021);
- a summary of multiple studies and a separate meta-analysis of studies that relied on data from a wide variety of sources, including service calls to police, domestic violence crime reports, emergency hotline registries, health records and other administrative documents (Peterman and O’Donnell, 2020; Piquero, Jennings, et al., 2021).

Estimates of a change in reported or actual incidents were mixed and varied by methodology, type and source of data, time periods covered and jurisdictions included. Some research found an immediate spike in IPV when COVID began and a drop in cases after stay-at-home orders were imposed. Others found an increase after mandatory orders were imposed and a decline as they were lifted. Since states and local jurisdictions adopted widely different stay-at-home policies in the early days of COVID, ranging from extremely strict to none at all, it is hard to generalize about the impact of these policies on trends in IPV.

Researchers point to ongoing and future questions that require study. Peterman and O’Donnell (2020) said there was “evidence of fluctuations across time, with violence prevalence shifting during initial and post-lockdown periods. While interesting and important for advocacy, it is time to transition away from this question and towards research that is aimed at informing policy efforts to prevent [violence against women and children] and mitigate its impact on survivors.” Piquero, Jennings et al. (2021) concluded: “Researchers and policy makers will need to identify both the short-and long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the risk for domestic violence and subsequent consequences.”

### **Were there increased barriers to reporting of IPV?**

The federal Office of Violence Against Women (OVAW, 2020) has noted that survivors may be reluctant to report IPV for reasons that were exacerbated by the pandemic and warns that communities should not take comfort in a lack of increased reporting or even a decline. OVAW told law enforcement agencies: “Jurisdictions experiencing a decline in the number of reports should ... treat it as a cause for concern, especially as aggravating factors – such as unemployment, reduced income, limited resources, and limited social support – compound.” Victims may not report abuse due to “fear of repercussion for reporting or lack of community trust and knowledge of available community support ... [or] because they fear that they or their partner will be exposed to COVID-19 through interacting with responding officers, from seeking shelter, or through their partner being jailed.”

Evans, Lindauer, and Farrell (2020) noted in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that domestic violence organizations prepared for an increased demand for services after stay-at-home orders were imposed but, in many communities, this increase did not come and calls declined. They cautioned: “Experts in the field knew that rates of IPV had not decreased, but rather that victims were unable to safely connect with services. Though restrictions on movement have been lifted in most regions, the pandemic and its effects rage on, and there is widespread

agreement that areas that have seen a drop in caseloads are likely to experience a second surge. This pandemic has reinforced important truths: inequities related to social determinants of health are magnified during a crisis, and sheltering in place does not inflict equivalent hardship on all people.”

### **Did the severity of violence change?**

Some research points to an increased severity of violence during the pandemic. For example:

- A statewide study of women and transgender/nonbinary individuals in Michigan, conducted during June-August 2020, found no increase in prevalence of IPV in that time period. However, the study found more serious violence (among 26.6% of those who experienced IPV during COVID) and an increase in “novel” cases of abuse in relationships where abuse had not occurred before (among 34.1% of those who experienced IPV during COVID). Authors reported that individuals at greater risk of IPV during the pandemic were “essential workers, pregnant, unable to afford rent, unemployed or underemployed or had recently changed jobs, had partners who had recently changed jobs, and those who had gotten tested or tested positive for COVID. Urban residence, trans/nonbinary identity, and having a toddler were more strongly associated with IPV during COVID as compared to before COVID.” (Peitzmeier and Fedina, 2021)
- Research at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston compared patients who experienced IPV during March 11 through May 3, 2020, with comparable data on patients who had experienced IPV during the same period in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The study showed a decrease in IPV survivors seeking hospital care during the pandemic, but physical injuries were more common and injuries were more severe, with a greater prevalence of “high-risk” abuse, such as strangulation, use of weapons, stab wounds and burns. Authors suggested that survivors might have waited to seek care until their abuse became severe. (Gosangi, Park, et al., 2020)

### **What is Known About IPV in Maryland and Montgomery County?**

Data on IPV during the pandemic in Maryland and specifically Montgomery County are limited and fragmentary. Available information shows differences between the state and the County and the United States as a whole.

The following is a glimpse of some recent information about Maryland and Montgomery County.

#### **Data on IPV in Maryland**

The National Network to End Domestic Violence takes a one-day unduplicated count of adults and children served at domestic violence programs each year, for the U.S. and for each state.

Maryland displayed a different pattern in the last two years when compared with the nation as a whole.

On the survey day in 2020, a total of 859 people were served in Maryland, with 331 in residential programs (emergency shelters or housing) and 528 in non-residential (counseling, legal advocacy, support groups). This was a notable increase, in total and in each category, from 2019 when 702 people were served in a single day in Maryland, with 281 in residential programs and 421 in non-residential. In contrast, the U.S. as a whole showed a very slight decline from 2019 to 2020 in total people served and a significant decline in the number receiving residential services. Hotline calls, which increased nationally, also rose in Maryland. Maryland hotlines handled 468 calls on the survey day in 2020, at a pace of 20 per hour, compared to 265 the previous year, or 11 per hour.

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV, 2021) reported that 56 people died in Maryland in 2020 in IPV-related homicides, including 38 intimate partners who all were killed with guns. This was the largest number of IPV-related homicides in Maryland in more than a decade and a 93% increase over 2019, which MNADV attributed to factors related to the pandemic. MNADV also reported data by county; 3 people died in IPV-related homicides in Montgomery County in 2020, compared to 4 people in 2019.

Reporting for Frontline, journalist Dan Glaun (2021) also focused attention on domestic violence-related shooting deaths and found that Maryland, at 93%, had one of the highest rates of increase in the country in 2020, along with Utah (160%), Texas (69%) and Missouri (67%). Glaun cited the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive, which tracks shootings and found the national average rate of increase in 2020 was 4%. Domestic violence advocates in Utah, Texas and Missouri cited weak gun laws as a potential factor in increased shootings. However, Glaun noted that Maryland has among the strictest gun laws in the country and cited MNADV's finding that the pandemic was a contributing factor.

### **Data on IPV in Montgomery County**

Little data are available about incidents of IPV in Montgomery County during COVID and whether or not they increased. One study, cited earlier in this report, examined domestic violence service calls to police in six jurisdictions, including Montgomery County. Authors found that calls spiked sharply after imposition of stay-at-home orders in five of the six jurisdictions, including Montgomery County, and declined in five of the six jurisdictions, again including Montgomery County, after these orders were lifted. (Nix and Richards, forthcoming)

The County Council Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) issued a report in July 2021 on the impact of COVID on women in Montgomery County in the areas of workplace equity/employment, child care, economic insecurity, access to health care and domestic violence. The report drew on information and data from County staff in multiple agencies. Because data were limited, the authors also received input from an extensive list of County and

regional organizations and nonprofits, including Court Watch Montgomery, referred to as community stakeholders. (Latham and Simmons, 2021)

The sections on domestic violence cited anecdotal information from County agencies, primarily the Family Justice Center, data on domestic violence crimes from the Montgomery County Police Department and stakeholder input. Despite limited data, the authors made the following overarching findings:

- *“The reported incidence of domestic violence in the County has not increased during the pandemic but the severity of reported incidents has increased significantly, primarily an increase in strangulations. County staff and stakeholders believe that the number of reported domestic violence incidents will increase as pandemic related restrictions continue to be lifted, as more in-person supports will be available to domestic violence survivors.”*

Stakeholders related that survivors may have been unable to report because they were financially dependent on their abuser, lacked a support system because of pandemic restrictions or had no place to go, especially with children. Family Justice Center staff also said that fewer survivors than usual reached out for services in the early months of COVID when they may not have known the Center was open, but this changed after launch of a County information campaign about available services. Many stakeholders anticipate a surge in reporting when survivors feel safer and more able to leave their situation.

Staff from multiple County agencies reported on the increased severity of domestic violence. For example, police data show that domestic violence-related aggravated assaults, which include strangulations, rose by 15% from the first five months of 2019 to the first five months of 2020, and by 26% from the first five months of 2020 to the first five months of 2021. Staff were unsure if the increase in reported strangulations reflected an increase in actual incidents or better police training to identify these incidents. (Also see Cloherty, 2021.) Stakeholders attributed increased severity of violence to pandemic-related factors such as increased alcohol consumption, isolation, inability to access the internet safely and the stress of working from home, school closures and lack of child care.

- *“One significant long-term impact of the pandemic on domestic violence survivors is the closure of the court system during the pandemic. Survivors have not been able to address divorce or custody issues, as those courts have been closed. As a result, many survivors have felt as if they cannot leave their situation until these issues can be addressed. Further, many cases have been delayed because of the pandemic, which is resulting in a backlog which may take months or years to catch up on.”*

In addition to raising concern about the closing of family court and its impact on IPV survivors, the report noted that changes in the handling of protective order hearings and criminal trials also affected survivors. For example, the report said that survivors are usually allowed to bring advocates to forensic exams and court proceedings, which was not always allowed during virtual hearings. Stopping or delaying criminal trials caused anxiety and fear among survivors

and led to backlogs. And while the courts continued to hear protective order cases, the report said unclear messaging and complicated virtual systems (especially for lower-income survivors without access to technology) discouraged individuals from reporting abuse.

## **How Did COVID Impact the Maryland Courts?**

In mid-March 2020, statewide administrative orders closed Maryland courts for an emergency period (then expected to last three weeks) and limited the types of cases that could be heard. Jury trials and family law proceedings were suspended, although the courts continued to hear domestic violence protective orders and family law emergencies. To the extent that courts had the capacity, they were authorized to hear matters remotely, providing “access to members of the public as justice requires.” Administrative judges or their designees were directed to review emergency matters and determine whether they must be heard in person or could be heard remotely, resolved without a hearing or postponed until after the emergency period had ended. (Maryland Judiciary, 2022)

In the nearly two years since the initial closing of the courts, operations have changed repeatedly as the courts have attempted to keep pace with a changing pandemic. Currently, in February 2022, the courts are in phase three of a five-phase reopening plan.

### **Impact on Court Watch Montgomery**

The initial closing of the courts, transition to virtual hearings and different phases of court reopening have posed challenges for CWM in pursuing its mission.

**Access Issues.** To accommodate for differences between in-person and remote monitoring, CWM had to revise monitoring forms for both criminal and civil protective order hearings, retrain volunteers for remote monitoring and pilot-test the process to ensure volunteers collected accurate and consistent data. Each step took time and could not begin until reliable remote access to hearings was obtained, including regular access to court dockets, providing names, times and courtrooms of domestic violence hearings.

During 2020 and the beginning of 2021, CWM struggled to gain consistent remote access as the court transitioned through different platforms and procedures. With each change in platform, volunteers were trained in the procedures to gain access, sometimes finding that the court had switched to a different platform or procedure without notice, resulting in missed hearings.

CWM was first given audio-visual access through Skype for Business in the summer of 2020. Because criminal court dockets were available online, CWM was able to pilot-test remote monitoring of criminal hearings in late summer and fall. Volunteers began regular monitoring and data collection in December 2020, when they learned the platform had changed to a Zoom audio-only link, to be accessed by calling the court each day. In late January 2021, public access was made available on the court website, after a statewide rollout of Zoom audio links to individual courtrooms.

For civil court, the ability of volunteers to remotely monitor was delayed by a lack of access to protective order dockets until February 2021, when a partner agency made them available to CWM. After revising forms and retraining volunteers, CWM began remote monitoring of protective order hearings in March. Importantly, CWM was also successful in purchasing audio recordings from the court of protective order hearings held in 2020 and part of 2021. Volunteers are now listening to hours of hearings and collecting and entering data. These recorded hearings will eventually help fill gaps in the CWM database for the pandemic period; however, they are not included in the data discussed below.<sup>2</sup>

**Quality Issues.** Even with access to Zoom audio links, volunteers faced recurring problems with audio livestreams that either stopped without notice mid-hearing or never began at all. Of 28 criminal court sessions and 15 civil protective order sessions, at which at least two CWM volunteers were remotely present, audio was unavailable for all or part of 6 criminal court sessions (21%) and 5 protective order sessions (33%). A “session” is typically a 3-4 hour period in which multiple hearings are held.

At hearings where audio was available, volunteers reported poor audio quality in 34% of the criminal hearings and 5% of the protective order hearings. Problems included faint or muffled voices (likely due to both microphone placement and wearing of masks) and background noise that made it difficult to hear what was said (e.g., shuffling papers close to the microphone). Hearing participants did not necessarily introduce themselves so it was sometimes difficult to know who was speaking or know the name of the presiding judge.

### **Findings from data on remotely monitored hearings**

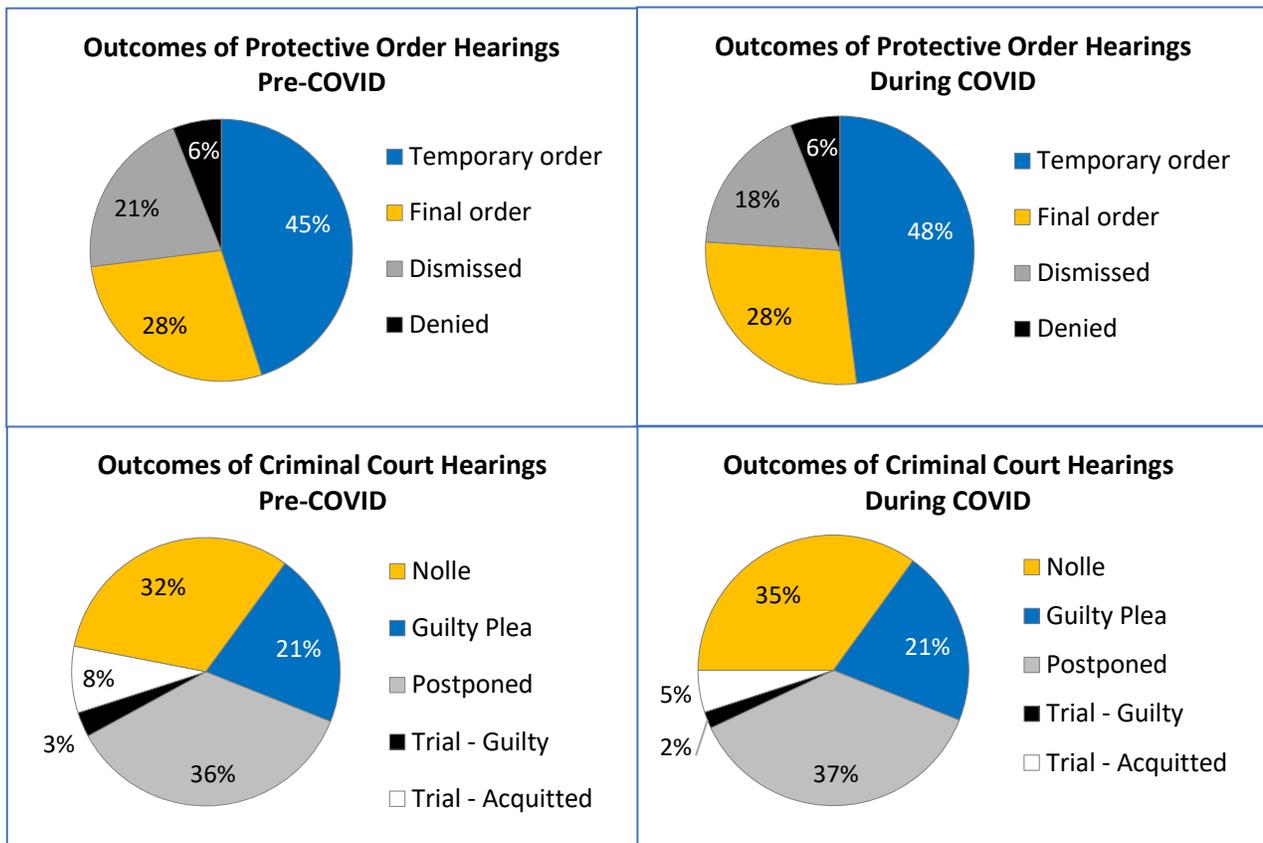
Despite challenges, a total of 20 CWM volunteers remotely monitored 128 criminal hearings during the period of December 2020-May 2021 and 82 protective order hearings during the period of March-May 2021. While court was still largely closed to the public, hearings were held in courtrooms by this time, with parties participating through a combination of in-person and remotely via Zoom. The amount of data from these hearings is limited but some preliminary and tentative findings can be shared.

**Hearing Outcomes.** The figure below compares outcomes of the remotely monitored hearings described above (identified as “During COVID”) with outcomes from the much larger database of hearings monitored from 2011 through February 2020 (identified as “Pre-COVID”). The “Pre-COVID” period reflects 7,790 protective order hearings and 3,151 criminal court hearings, all of which were monitored by CWM volunteers in person.

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<sup>2</sup> This report only discusses data collected remotely during the period when in-person access to court was not available or very limited. Remote public access is no longer available and CWM volunteers have returned to in-person monitoring. CWM will eventually have more data available for analysis for the entirety of 2020 and 2021 with the addition of audio recordings and in-person monitoring in the second half of 2021.

For protective order hearings, outcomes include granting of a temporary or a final order, or dismissal or denial of the petition seeking an order. For criminal hearings, outcomes include “nolle” (meaning charges were dropped), a guilty plea (plea deal), postponement of the hearing or a trial that results in either a guilty verdict or acquittal (not guilty).



The figure shows that outcomes were slightly different before and during the COVID period. Criminal court outcomes showed a small decline in the share of hearings that included a trial, regardless of verdict (from 11% pre-COVID to 7% during COVID). There also was a small increase (from 32% to 35%) in the share of hearings where charges were dropped (“nolle”). The state may drop charges for multiple reasons, including insufficient evidence or the unavailability of a witness, for example, the victim. These findings could potentially be related to the delay of certain hearings when courts were closed, as well as scheduling challenges after they reopened. For example, social distancing required that only a small number of cases could be heard in the courtroom and only at specified time slots. State prosecutors also may have had greater difficulty investigating cases and locating and presenting witnesses during the pandemic, which could potentially have led to an increase in dropped charges (nolles).

Protective order outcomes also showed a small difference, with an increase in granting of temporary orders (from 45% pre-COVID to 48% during COVID) and a corresponding reduction in dismissals (from 21% pre-COVID to 18% during COVID). There are multiple potential

explanations for these findings, including an increased severity of abuse; thus, it will be useful to see if these patterns continue or become more pronounced when more data can be analyzed. Also in light of concerns about increased severity, a question may be whether more criminal IPV cases went to Circuit Court, where the most serious cases are typically heard. CWM monitors District Court only.

**Attorney Presence.** CWM's data suggest a significant reduction in attorney presence at protective order hearings. Petitioners were represented by attorneys in 28% of protective order hearings prior to COVID, but only 16% of petitioners were represented by an attorney at hearings monitored remotely during the COVID period.

Again, this finding should be considered highly tentative but it raises potential questions about the ability of survivors to be represented in court. Reduced presence of attorneys, possibly because of miscommunications about schedule changes during the COVID period or for other reasons, could negatively affect outcomes for survivors seeking protective orders. CWM has previously reported: "Intimate partner violence victims who come alone to hearings are far less likely to get justice for a range of reasons, including judges' reluctance to actively engage with petitioners who represent themselves and the difficulty petitioners have in testifying effectively without preparation or guidance during the hearing from legal counsel." (Duker, L., 2019)

**Victim Advocates.** Compounding the concern about reduced attorney presence is the report that victim advocates were unable to appear at protective order hearings during parts of the pandemic, as noted earlier in the discussion of the Office of Legislative Oversight report.<sup>3</sup> Victim advocates are trained in the basics of protective order law and procedures, are familiar with the facts of a survivor's case, can help people navigate the system and provide essential emotional support during hearings. According to the 2019 CWM report cited above, "In most cases the data show that advocates make an impact equal to lawyers in helping victims obtain orders and key provisions." Unlike attorneys, however, victim advocates do not routinely speak on the record at hearings and because CWM had audio-only access to court, volunteers were unable to collect data on the presence of advocates in court.

## Moving Forward

As the courts continue to respond to the needs of the public and the particular needs of survivors during a time of extreme uncertainty, a few issues can be highlighted based on the experience of the past two years.

**The need for remote access to hearings, for the public as well as survivors of IPV, will likely continue.** COVID continues to be a factor and public health officials predict that similar emergencies will happen in the future. Court Watch PG, which monitors bail hearings in Prince

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<sup>3</sup> Judge Ferretti also noted that victim advocates were not available at virtual hearings at the May 2020 meeting of the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council; see [May 2020 minutes](#).

George's County, has called for permanent public access to the courts.<sup>4</sup> Senators Rosapepe and Benson and Delegate Moon have introduced legislation ([SB 469](#) and [HB 647](#)) that would provide permanent public audio-visual access for all public proceedings, including domestic violence hearings, unless otherwise deemed closed, confidential or restricted under federal or state law. If enacted, this legislation could ensure Maryland courts are prepared for future crises and be a major step toward greater transparency.

**The impact of remote access on representation by attorneys and victim advocates may be a concern.** As noted above, CWM's limited data suggest a reduction in attorney presence at protective order hearings during COVID, raising questions about the cause of any such reduction and whether virtual attendance by either survivors or attorneys could be a factor. Moreover, victim advocates were not always able to accompany survivors at protective order hearings; the reasons for this are not clear and require further exploration.

CWM research in 2019, cited earlier, found that judges are more likely to deny protective orders when petitioners appear without a lawyer or advocate. Even when orders are granted, representation at final hearings is especially critical to ensure they properly address such issues as child visitation, emergency financial support or counseling for respondents. Thus, any barrier to representation is of concern. Currently, parties are encouraged to attend hearings in person but may request to participate virtually, subject to approval of the judge. This option may be important for various reasons, including for survivors who feel uncomfortable or unsafe in the physical presence of their abuser. Procedures might be considered to ensure that when survivors participate remotely, whether by choice or because of a crisis like COVID, their access to representation is not diminished.

**Not enough is known about the impact of COVID on IPV survivors or their experiences in court.** Despite an array of studies and reporting, most of what is known about the prevalence and nature of IPV during the pandemic is anecdotal. Even less information is available about the impact of COVID on court proceedings and outcomes.

The limited data and tentative findings discussed in this report point to the importance of a robust program of court monitoring by impartial well-trained community volunteers. When volunteer monitors go to court, they see and hear what survivors experience as they seek justice and safety for themselves and their families. The extensive data that Court Watch Montgomery typically collects on criminal and civil IPV hearings hold the courts accountable to the public and identify important trends and anomalies that might otherwise go unseen.

As the COVID pandemic evolves and continues to impact the lives of IPV survivors, we are eager to return to full-scale monitoring and the ability to explore numerous pressing questions and report our detailed findings to the courts and the public.

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<sup>4</sup> See Court Watch PG ["Keep Courts Virtual!"](#) campaign.

## Appendix: What is a “CWM Case”?

Court Watch Montgomery monitors hearings in cases of abuse *only* where the relationship indicates a current or former intimate partnership. Most commonly, these include current or former spouses, people who dated or had a consensual sexual relationship within the past year, people who lived together for at least 90 days in the past year or parents of a child in common. CWM also monitors hearings in cases where an adult, such as a parent or guardian, files on behalf of a minor teenager for a protective order against the minor’s peer (no more than a 3-year age difference) with whom the minor had a sexual relationship.

Maryland law defines domestic violence also to include other relationships, including between siblings, parents or children (§4.501m). While all cases that meet the state’s definition of domestic violence are heard in the same session, CWM only collects and analyzes data from hearings involving intimate partners.

Maryland law defines specific acts of violence or “abuse” to include:

- serious bodily harm;
- placing a person in fear of imminent serious bodily harm;
- assault in any degree;
- rape or sexual offense, or attempted rape or sexual offense in any degree;
- false imprisonment;
- stalking; or
- revenge porn. (§4.501b)

In civil protective order hearings, victims are referred to as “petitioners” and their alleged abusers as “respondents”. CWM also monitors criminal cases where victims are/were intimate partners regardless of whether a protective order is in effect. In criminal cases, “defendants” are charged with criminal acts of abuse. Victims are not parties in a criminal case but may testify as a witness, present a victim impact statement or be the complainant in the case.

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