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# INTIMATE PARTNER/ DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SENTINEL EVENT REVIEW REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*MILWAUKEE HOMICIDE REVIEW COMMISSION*

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# Overview

This report is intended to provide an overview of the Sentinel Event Review conducted on the death of Bobbie Lou Schoeffling, in Milwaukee, WI. As of the time of this report her ex-partner, Nicholas Howell, has been convicted of stalking, first-degree intentional homicide, possession of a firearm by a felon, felony intimidation of a victim, misdemeanor battery, and disorderly conduct in her July 2022 death. This situation has received significant attention in the media as an example of potential gaps in systems intended to protect those experiencing victimization due to domestic or intimate partner violence.

At the request of the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD), a group was convened by the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission to conduct a Sentinel Event Review of this incident. The purpose is to conduct a thorough review of unexpected deaths to better understand the circumstances and risk factors and to take actionable steps toward prevention of similar future events. In this case, the review specifically addresses questions and concerns about the response to domestic violence (DV) or intimate partner violence (IPV) incidents<sup>1</sup> in Milwaukee as identified through this incident. The intent of the review is to bring a multi-disciplinary team together to consider the circumstances of the incident, events leading up to the incident, and system responses that occurred along the way. The review does

not focus or dwell in on any formal procedure (S. 9 (b) 4 (b) 1-4 s 2 (e) 1 (c) 1 (d) (8) 6 (b) 2 (e) 3 (a) 2 008 897 01 31 7 10 1 Tc

impact of the recommendations if implemented. Those assessed with the highest potential impact are listed as the priority recommendations and the remaining recommendations are grouped into second and third tiers so that the full range of recommendations generated is documented. Recommendations are then grouped into categories within each tier. Review team members were also asked to identify the complexity of each recommendation in terms of what it would take to implement, and the overall assessment (high/medium/low) is listed with each recommendation. Given the high volume of recommendations, they are grouped into categories to make interpretation easier and to facilitate connections across recommendations. Where appropriate, there are also updates listed on some recommendations where implementation has started or where progress has been made since the time of the initial event. The report does not go into details on the incident, but rather focuses on the recommendations from the review process.

The next steps in this process will involve identifying agencies or organizations to help lead the implementation of specific recommendations, or the agencies currently leading if a recommendation is already in process, with a focus on those recommendations listed as priority/high potential impact. The priority recommendations will be the focus of the initial action planning, with input from the group sought to identify a subset (5-10) of the priority recommendations for most immediate action. This will include identifying implementation steps, cost, and timeline. Follow-up will be conducted at six-month intervals and reported to track progress of the recommendations to support accountability for system and process change.

## Acknowledgements

The following agencies and organizations participated in the review process by sending a representative and/or providing information to support the review process.

Alma Center	Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office
Benedict Center	Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office
City of Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission	Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission
City of Milwaukee Mayor's Office	Milwaukee Police Department
City of Milwaukee Common Council	Safe and Sound
Medical College of Wisconsin	Sojourner Family Peace Center
Milwaukee Community Justice Council	The Asha Project
Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health Services	Wisconsin Department of Corrections

We would like to acknowledge the role of the Milwaukee Police Department in both requesting this review, as well as supporting the process by providing information and sending representatives to participate on the team. Additional law enforcement agencies also assisted in providing information for incidents that occurred outside of the City of Milwaukee. Many thanks also to Charles Vear, MPH and Amy Parry, MPH of the Medical College of Wisconsin for their critical work on this process.

# Priority Recommendations

## Resources

Expand the resources for the Domestic Violence High-Risk Team (DVHRT) to increase capacity for the number of cases staffed by the team longer-term and to support resource needs of the DVHRT agencies.

In process

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warrants

Explore a system for distributing DV hotline calls coming in to include agencies with a specific culturally specific approach or population of focus.

Not started

Not yet known

Medium

The intent was to build on the current hotline model but develop a way to distribute the calls more directly to agencies that have a specific culturally specific approach or population of focus as part of the overall system capacity. It was suggested that this could build on the current model in place through the Sojourner Family Peace Center. This is likely a complex recommendation to implement. A first step would be to seek information from other large, urban jurisdictions that may have existing processes to manage this type of coordination across different organizations and agencies. A process would also need to be developed for ide 5.511 0 Taga10.1 (i)-3.3

Explore ways to improve system responses to victims who recant or do not want to pursue charges, particularly when the person perpetrating the abuse is not in custody.

Not started

Not yet known

Medium

There was a general concern that victim participation in the criminal justice process is critical, but out of safety or other concerns individuals may not want to participate and this may be particularly true when the individual accused of perpetrating DV/IPV is not in custody. This recommendation is intended to identify ways to improve system responses to victims who may not want to participate in the criminal justice process. This also ties to the recommendations about safety concerns, expanding efforts to apprehending individuals who have absconded from community supervision or have an active warrant, and evidence-based prosecution (priority recommendations 8, 3, and 17 respectively).

## Research and Evaluation

Examine the impact of MPD conducting a second outreach to victims who decline referrals to DV resources to identify how often this is leading to consent to share information with advocacy organizations. This recommendation is connected to Marsy's Law.

In process

No

Low

This recommendation would help to understand whether there has been an increase in victims consenting to share information with advocacy organizations. Data is currently being



individuals with DV/IPV history who also have prior firearm-related offenses and the likelihood of future involvement in DV/IPV incidents with a firearm.

## Emergency and Law Enforcement Response

Review current training for law enforcement and telecommunication operators on how questions are asked regarding relationship status and follow-up questions during early interactions with individuals who may be experiencing DV/IPV.

Not started

Not yet known

Low

The intent is to enhance training to improve identification of potential DV/IPV situations where the relationship or living situation may not be readily apparent or shared (e.g., does the abuser have a key, do they have a child in common). It was noted that this will not address cases where the victim would not be able to say yes due to other factors (e.g., current requirements that would prohibit living together

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: Consider developing a process wherein high-risk DV perpetrators placed on community supervision are assigned directly to agents with specialization in working with this population through outreach from MCDAO to DOC immediately after sentencing.

In process

Not yet known

Medium

There are existing mechanisms within DOC to track perpetrators identified through DVHRT reviews as their cases are processed and they are placed on community supervision for DV-related incidents. This recommendation is focused on expanding this process to potentially high-risk offenders identified based on criteria from DVHRT and sharing resources in terms of following up on the cases and eliminating gaps in services. An example would be an individual convicted of a serious DV incident that was never staffed by DVHRT.

: Improve the current DOC response to individuals on supervision who are also victims of DV/IPV.

In process

Not yet known

Medium

The intent of this recommendation is to address the inherent dangers a victim faces in a relationship that has been assessed as high risk. DOC could potentially improve the response to individuals who are on community supervision and have a history of DV/IPV victimization. Considerations could include further educating agents on connecting victims with services in a timely manner to ensure victim safety and recovery efforts or developing a more direct referral system between DOC and DV service agencies to allow DOC agents to facilitate direct outreach to clients who are on community supervision and have or are experiencing DV victimization.

## Community Outreach, Education, and Awareness

Consider developing educational materials for the community to raise awareness of DV and IPV.

## Statutory/Legislative

Further explore the implications of IPV situations (such as a dating situation where the individuals are not living together and do not have a child in common) that do not meet the statutory definition of DV/DA and thus are not included many of the aspects of DV response. Then consider whether to recommend changes to the current DA statute.

Not started

Not yet known, but likely

Medium

This recommendation has many layers and potential implications, w (at0 Tw )-4.9 (h)-8 ( c)5.9 (h)-0.4.9 (

## Postvention

Conduct a next of kin interview with particular family members, to share the recommendations and identify additional gaps and opportunities and include their recommendations in updates to this report.

Not started

No

Medium

The group discussed the importance of conducting direct outreach to the family to both share information about the review process and steps being taken in response to the incident and to this review. This would be conducted by a social worker through the Medical College of Wisconsin and would also include offering additional support and resources. This may





## DA Response

Identify potential options for advocates to be available during the charging conference in DV/IPV situations.

Not started

Not yet known

Low

This recommendation is intended to enhance the support provided to victims by the MCDAO by having the ability to have victim advocates present during



: Disseminate information within law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies about responding to an increased reaction or level of concern from victims that may be due to the level of threat they are experiencing or their perceived risk.

Not started

Not yet known

## Tier 3 Recommendations

### Resources

Explore additional expansion of DVHRT capacity (potentially another team) with a focus on having culturally specific agencies involved in the staffing process.

Not started

Yes

Medium

In addition to the expansion of the DVHRT overall capacity, this recommendation focused on potentially building and expanded or additional team with specific emphasis on involving agencies that have a specific culturally specific approach or population of focus. This recommendation is related to Marsy's Law.

Document current capacity for DV response and the expansions that have occurred recently to identify longer-term funding needs.

In process

No

Low

Recent funding expansion for some DV services such as the expansion of DVHRT is short-term. This recommendation is to document that expansion and the (t)-2.9 (ly)-4.51yentni (t) 8 1 T23 -1.u31

## Research and Evaluation

Based on existing research, best practices, and expertise from partner advocacy agencies, identify the recommended steps for individuals attempting to separate from a relationship in a DV or IPV situation. This may then lead to an opportunity for education with partner agencies and organizations that are part of the DV response.

Not started

No

Low

This is intended to provide more background on the risks associated with separation and recommended steps to for how an individual can be safer when separating from a partner where this is DV/IPV history.

Review existing research on the connection between previous DV/IPV relationships and future risk for DV/IPV (risk transference) for both those experiencing victimization and those perpetrating abuse. Share the results of this literature review with those agencies or organizations involved in DV response to potentially enhance training in this area.

Not started

No

Medium

The intent of this recommendation is to assess what is currently known about risk transference, specifically transferring risk of DV/IPV across different relationships (such as a new partner for someone with a history of DV/IPV with previous a previous partner(s)) and how this can inform agencies or organizations responding to DV/IPV situations.

Review existing literature on the connection between other types of abuse (child abuse, sexual assault) and risk for DV/IPV. Share findings to encourage additional focus on addressing earlier types of abuse that may related to future risk DV/IPV for both those perpetrating abuse and those experiencing victimization.

Not started

No

Low

The intent of this recommendation is to assess what is currently known about heightened risk of DV/IPV for those with history of other types of abuse and how this can inform agencies or organizations responding to DV/IPV situations.

## Emergency and Law Enforcement Response



Review and potentially enhance the current DV treatment options offered by DOC to individuals who are incarcerated and have a DV/IPV history.

Not started

Not yet known

High

The focus of this recommendation was to better understand the current DV programming offered by DOC and whether there are potential areas to enhance or expand that programming for individuals who are incarcerated and have a DV/IPV history.

## Community Outreach, Education, and Awareness

Examine the curriculum currently used in high school on dating and DV/IPV/healthy relationships and identify potential opportunities for improvements.

Not started

No

Medium

This recommendation focuses on the curriculum currently offered in high school to address IPV in dating relationships. This would consider both what is currently offered in the curriculum, whether students can opt out of this content, and whether there are opportunities for improvement.

Consider expanding ad hoc programming for youth/young adults on DV/IPV/healthy relationships in spaces outside of school (e.g., youth centers).

Not started

Yes

Medium

Expanding ad hoc programming in other spaces was discussed as a complement to reviewing what is already underway in schools (tier 3 recommendation 14).

Identify existing local trainings or curriculum on healthy relationships and opportunities to expand or enhance this programming.

Not started

Yes

Medium

This was discussed in the context of curriculum that had been offered by the Alma Center and the Parenting Network and understanding whether this is still being offered, and if so where and who can access the resources, as well as whether it could be enhanced or expanded.

Identify ways to further educate agency partners and community members about lethality risk with DV/IPV.

In process

Not yet known

Low

This recommendation is focused on expanding the understanding of the lethality risk in DV/IPV situations. This is partially underway as specific agencies have outreach efforts such as

Sojourner's focus on "Know Your Risk." There is also consideration to providing a way for people to assess their own lethality risk.

Develop a process or campaign to increase community awareness of DV upstream prevention opportunities.

Not started

Yes

Medium

The intent is to further community understanding of ways that DV/IPV can be prevented.

## Criminal Justice System Outreach, Education, and Training

Ensure agents and outreach positions across criminal justice agencies and other DV/IPV organizations are aware of the resources available to support DV/IPV victims.

Not started