



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2024-2025 COURT WATCH REPORT

DAIS Mission - Empower those affected by intimate partner violence and advocate for social change through support, education, and outreach.

OVERVIEW

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS) Court Watch Program observes Dane County injunction hearings to establish a data-driven analysis of the Circuit Court system's advancement of victim safety and perpetrator accountability in intimate partner violence cases.

The Court Watch Program aims to 1) improve the experience of survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) who seek restraining orders, 2) provide information to legal stakeholders regarding trends in the court system's handling of Domestic Abuse and Harassment injunction cases, 3) identify recommendations for improved trauma-informed and victim-centric responses to Domestic Abuse and Harassment injunction cases and 4) further inform legal stakeholders about the role of service representatives in the court process.

Please contact Kianna Hanson, DAIS Community Advocacy Manager, at kiannah@abuseintervention.org for the full report.

OBJECTIVE FINDINGS

- **739** total cases observed
- **31%** of cases were Domestic Abuse Injunctions, **68%** were Harassment Injunctions, and **1%** were Individual at Risk Injunctions
- Of the hearings observed, **32%** of injunctions were granted.
- **Lack of representation: 90%** of petitioners appeared *pro se*
- **14%** of petitioners were accompanied by a **service representative**
- **Gender disparities:** 75% of petitioners were female, 65% of respondents were male
- **Petitioners with a service representative were 106% more likely to have their injunction granted.**

A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Chai Moua, *Freedom Inc.*
- Dana Pellebon, *RCC Sexual Violence Resource Center*
- Hope Vang, *Freedom Inc.*
- Jan Miyasaki, *Project Respect*
- Lucia Ledesma, *UNIDOS WI*
- Virginia Gittens Escudero, *UNIDOS WI*

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STATISTICS

1 in 3 cis-gendered women will experience IPV in their lifetime *

Abusers with access to firearms are five times more likely to kill their victims **

In 2024, firearms were the weapons used in 71% of domestic violence deaths. ***

LETHALITY RISK FACTORS **

- Stalking
- Contact with law enforcement
- Threats to take their own life
- Threats to kill victim
- Access to a firearm
- Strangulation

WISCONSIN STATUTE §895.45

Allows an adult who alleges they have been the victim of a crime to select a service representative from an organization or victim assistance program to attend hearings, depositions and court proceedings (both civil and criminal) with them.

BEST PRACTICES

- Use of lethality risk assessment
- Compassion & Validation from Judges
- Understanding Dynamics of Domestic Abuse
- Clear explanations of court processes and procedures

OBSERVER CONCERNS

- Inconsistencies around service by publication requirements
- Very few same sex IPV filings
- Perpetuation of harmful myths regarding IPV
- Undermining serious lethality risks
- Inconsistent expectations and procedures

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022 ** Campbell JC, Webster D, Koziol-McLain J. et al *Taken from the 2024 Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicide Report, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consistency around service by publication requirements, including creating a clear handout for judges to give to petitioners at the set over hearing AND a clear handout available online when individuals file for Temporary Restraining Orders.
2. Continued education around dynamics of domestic violence and trauma responses. Concerning trends have continued, such as the fallacy of the “cooling off period” or expecting victims to behave a certain way. Because judges only handle injunction hearings a few times a year, it is important to stay educated on DV dynamics and statutory protections for victims.
3. Increased familiarity and understanding of resources that can support survivors, such as DAIS, Freedom Inc., Project Respect, RCC Sexual Violence Resource Center, and UNIDOS.
4. Create a more welcoming courtroom for LGBTQ+ survivors, such as putting up signs and asking and respecting pronouns.
5. Clear and consistent procedures and expectations, including allowing parties who are unrepresented to testify from counsel table, putting in place guardrails for cross-examination during pro se hearings, and having a standardized procedure for admission of evidence.



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