

# The Judicial Oversight Demonstration Initiative

## DEMONSTRATION SITES

City of Boston/Dorchester  
District Court, MA

Washtenaw County, Ann  
Arbor, MI

Milwaukee County, WI

## The Challenge

Domestic violence is a complex issue for communities across the country. When the criminal justice system intervenes in domestic violence cases, numerous agencies and departments become involved. In addition to civil, criminal, and family courts, agencies such as probation, batterer intervention programs, child protective services, law enforcement, victim advocacy organizations, district attorney's offices and other legal and social support associations are also involved.

Success in reducing repeat offending and ensuring victim safety in domestic violence cases depends largely on effective collaboration between these agencies, and between them, individuals seeking assistance from the system and the community at large. When there is a lack of collaboration, victims face an increased risk of repeated violence. Practitioners agree that the most effective way to reduce domestic violence is a consistent and coordinated response from the community, along with clear and immediate consequences from the judicial system for those who batter.

## NATIONAL PARTNERS

Violence Against Women  
Office  
[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo)

National Institute of  
Justice  
[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij)

Urban Institute  
[www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

Vera Institute of Justice  
[www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)

## The Idea

The Judicial Oversight Demonstration (JOD) Initiative tests the idea that a coordinated community response to domestic violence that ensures a focused judicial response and a systematic criminal justice response can improve victim safety and service provision, as well as increase offender accountability.

The priorities of the JOD initiative include victim safety and well-being, strong judicial commitment to actively ensuring victim safety and offender accountability as well as improved availability of victim services and advocacy in coordination with all segments of the criminal justice system and the community.

To hold offenders accountable, the JOD initiative encourages the development or enhancement of grassroots community and justice system partnerships designed to assist offenders in changing abusive behavior.

Each demonstration site is working to implement a strong research component to improve the evaluation's effectiveness to measure impact - that is, "what works" - to reduce or stop domestic violence, enhance victim safety and well-being, and hold batterers accountable.

## The Model

- *Uniform and consistent initial responses* to domestic violence offenses including pro-arrest policies, arrest of primary aggressor, and a coordinated response by law enforcement and victim advocates.
- *Coordinated victim advocacy and services* including contact by victim advocates immediately after the domestic violence incident, an individualized safety plan for the victim and children, provision of needed services such as shelters, protection orders, etc.
- *Strong offender accountability and oversight* including intensive, court-based supervision, referral to appropriate batterer intervention programs, and administrative and judicial sanctions and incentives to influence offender behavior.
- *Rigorous research and evaluation* component to gauge the initiative's effects on victims, offenders, the criminal justice system, and the community.
- *Centralized technical assistance* to aid sites in planning, implementation and problem solving.

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## Demonstration Sites

During fiscal year 1999, three demonstration sites were competitively selected to participate in this five-year demonstration initiative: City of Boston/Dorchester District Court, MA; Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor, MI; and Milwaukee County, WI. Since implementation, each demonstration site has developed multiple governmental and non-governmental partnerships working to address domestic violence. Typical partnerships include victim advocacy organizations, local law enforcement agencies, prosecution offices, courts, probation and parole offices, representatives from the private and public defense bar, batterer intervention services and other governmental and non-governmental social service providers—all working to create long-term sustainability of effective local innovations.

In addition, each site employs a local project director and a local site evaluator who serve as the project's primary points of contact and oversee the initiative's implementation.

## National Partnerships

The JOD initiative is jointly funded and managed by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs' Violence Against Women Office and the National Institute of Justice. In addition to the programmatic initiatives at each site, there is a comprehensive national evaluation and a centralized technical assistance effort. The national evaluation is being conducted by the Urban Institute in Washington, DC. The Urban Institute's work is informed by NIJ's National Evaluation Program Board and Urban's close collaboration with each site's local evaluator—all working to identify and disseminate knowledge and skills acquired by local efforts.

The technical assistance is led by the Vera Institute of Justice in New York, NY. To provide this assistance, Vera and VAWO have assembled a team of national associates—active practitioners and experts grounded in practice—who work in consultation with the sites to help them navigate the political, financial, and bureaucratic obstacles that frequently block system change. Associates provide on-site consultations, training and educational opportunities within and across sites, as well as providing direction to the national partners.