



Chapter 7

Court Security

MADISON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE POLICY: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND COURT SECURITY

FRAMEWORK: COURTHOUSE SECURITY IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-RELATED CASES

In addition to its patrol response and investigation of domestic violence crimes, a sheriff's office generally has responsibilities for providing courtroom security. In the interagency response to domestic violence, each of these functions has a role in reinforcing the common goal of protection of and safety for individual victims and the community. Attention to courthouse security helps minimize: victim intimidation, risk to victims, their advocates and family members; and risks that domestic violence offenders present to courthouse personnel and other interveners.

POLICY ON COURTHOUSE SECURITY

In addition to adhering to general policies of the sheriff's office, personnel assigned to courtroom security will maintain security in the courthouse by responding to the safety needs of victims of domestic violence crimes and the general public.

PROTOCOL ON COURTHOUSE SECURITY

1. General procedures

- a. Ensure visibility of court officers. Observable court security reassures victims and witnesses and puts defendants on notice that safety is a priority. Make court officers aware of hostilities to service providers, such as domestic violence advocates and abuser program staff, and lawyers, judges, and other court personnel involved in domestic violence-related proceedings. Be prepared to respond to requests for assistance from victims, victim advocates, or others concerned about the possibility of victim intimidation or violations of court orders in the courthouse. See *Appendix 1A: Practitioners' Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases*.
- b. Post signs throughout the courthouse that read as follows: "No-contact orders/orders for protection remain in effect in the courthouse. Violations should be reported to the Sheriff's Office." For purposes of this protocol, "no-contact order" refers to any court order prohibiting contact between the victim and suspect, whether an order issued by a civil court, or a no-contact or stay-away order issued in a criminal proceeding.
- c. Obtain the daily calendar from the clerk's office when it's available and make note of which cases are domestic violence cases and whether a no-contact order is in place.

2. Out-of-custody calendars

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- a. Throughout the courthouse and in the courtrooms, remain alert for any attempt by defendants to intimidate or harass victims. Be prepared to respond to requests for assistance from court personnel, victims, or victim's advocates. If one person is attempting to harass or intimidate another, intervene by separating and identifying the parties. Inquire of the parties whether a no-contact order is in place.
 - b. When a safety concern is communicated by a victim, victim advocate, or victim's representative, strongly encourage the victim to use the designated safe waiting area. If requested by the victim and as time and resources permit, escort the victim to the designated secure area. Inform the clerk in the appropriate courtroom of the victim's whereabouts.
 - c. If informed of victim or witness intimidation or harassment, or a possible violation of a no-contact order, take whatever action reasonable and necessary to address the defendant's behavior, including making an arrest if probable cause has been established that a crime has been committed. Examples of criminal conduct that may occur in a courthouse include but are not limited to disorderly conduct, intimidating a participant in a legal process, witness tampering, obstructing governmental operations, and violation of an order of protection.
 - d. Report to the prosecutor any incident of victim intimidation or harassment by a defendant and document the intimidation or harassment as requested by the prosecutor.
 - e. If a victim expresses concern for his or her safety following the court proceeding and requests the assistance of deputies, escort that person from the building as time and resources permit.
- 3. In-custody calendars**
- a. No in-custody defendant will be allowed to pass or receive anything from anyone or have contact with anyone in the gallery, except as ordered by the judge.
 - b. If a defendant attempts to intimidate the victim or others through visual contact or gestures, or if he or she is the subject of a no-contact order and attempts any communication with the victim, intervene immediately to stop the behavior and notify the judge and the prosecutor. If the behavior persists, remove the defendant to a holding cell until his or her proceeding is about to begin.

APPENDICES

The following appendices are attached to and included as part of the court security policy:

- *Appendix 1A: Practitioners' Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases*

See the Madison County Blueprint for Safety Appendix for appendices referenced in the policy and protocols.