

*The Connection  
Between*  
**Gun Violence &  
Intimate Partner  
Violence**

Domestic Violence Fatality &  
Near Fatality Review Board

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



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# The Connection Between Domestic Violence Homicide and Guns

Research consistently demonstrates that the presence of a firearm in a domestic violence situation increases the likelihood of a woman being killed by approximately five times.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, there were at least 54 domestic violence related homicides in New Jersey with approximately 30 percent involving a firearm.<sup>2</sup>

Firearms function not only as a lethal weapon but as tools of coercive control. Perpetrators may brandish a gun to instill fear, threaten to kill the victim or loved ones, fire shots near the victim, use the firearm to physically assault without causing fatal injury or imply constant danger through visible possession. These tactics reinforce coercive control, limit a survivor's ability to leave, and escalate the risk of serious injury or death.<sup>3</sup> A 2024 study by the Battered Women's Justice Project found that survivors threatened with firearms experienced, on average, three distinct types of gun-related threats from a current or former abusive partner. These threats included verbal threats to use a firearm to cause harm, intentionally leaving a gun accessible to instill fear, and directly pointing a gun at the victim or others.<sup>4</sup>

Although domestic violence affects all genders, data demonstrates that women experience higher rates of domestic violence and domestic violence-related homicides. In the United States, nearly half of all female homicide victims were perpetrated by an intimate partner, compared to approximately 10% of male victims. While men represent the majority of firearm homicide victims overall, women are disproportionately affected in domestic violence related firearm deaths.<sup>5</sup>

When domestic violence perpetrators have access to firearms, it is not just the victim and perpetrator who are at risk, but also other family members, a current intimate partner, friends, strangers, and law enforcement.<sup>6</sup> The U.S. Surgeon General's 2024 Advisory emphasized that "the presence of a firearm in the home has been associated with higher risk of being a victim of homicide and suicide among all household members."<sup>7</sup> Overall, firearms allow for more lethality in any situation, making dangerous situations more unsafe due to their quick and effectual nature.

## New Jersey Laws on Domestic Violence and Firearms

Federal law prohibits firearm possession by individuals convicted of qualifying domestic violence offenses or subject to certain restraining orders. However, enforcement varies by state due to inconsistent reporting to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) differing definitions of domestic relationships, and variable firearm surrender procedures.<sup>8 9 10</sup>

New Jersey is widely regarded as having some of the strictest gun laws in the United States. These multiple firearm safety measures, include, but are not limited to:

- **Implement a "red flag" law, allowing the temporary removal of firearms from a person suspected of being a danger to themselves or others;**

- **Enacting a law requiring firearm transactions to go through a licensed dealer that provides a background check;**
- **Bans on assault firearms and "ghost guns";**
- **Require a purchase permit for handgun purchases (with only 1 purchase allowed every 30 days);**
- **Suicide prevention education available on the counter of each retail firearm store;**
- **Prohibit the possession of a firearm in certain locations, such as schools, government buildings, healthcare facilities, and parks, and on all private property unless the business has expressly provided consent or signage to allow firearms on their premises; and**
- **Require firearms to be unloaded when in motor vehicles.<sup>11 12</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> <https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/10/IPV-for-WEB-042921A-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [State Data: New Jersey | Center for Gun Violence Solutions](https://www.ncdsv.org/uploads/1/4/2/2/142238266/2024-us-surgeon-generals-advisory-on-firearm-violence.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cstsonline.org/research-review/issue-archive/march-2023/assessing-when-threats-with-firearms-are-forms-of-coercive-control-in-domestic-violence>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bwjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/for-publication.2024-Domestic-Violence-and-Firearms-Report-by-BWJP-and-NDVH-12.4.2024.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncdsv.org/uploads/1/4/2/2/142238266/2024-us-surgeon-generals-advisory-on-firearm-violence.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://injepjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ncdsv.org/uploads/1/4/2/2/142238266/2024-us-surgeon-generals-advisory-on-firearm-violence.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.findlaw.com/family/domestic-violence/the-domestic-violence-offender-gun-ban.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://nrcdsv.org/news/reporting-domestic-offenses-to-background-check-systems-does-it-really-matter/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/guide/misdemeanor-crimes-domestic-violence-and-federal-firearms-prohibitions/download>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.findlaw.com/state/new-jersey-law/new-jersey-gun-control-laws.html>

<sup>12</sup> *The New Jersey Code of Criminal Justice, Chapter 39 and Chapter 58 (N.J.S.2C:39 and N.J.S.2C:58)*

While these numerous provisions are likely one of the reasons that New Jersey had the fourth-lowest firearm mortality in the nation (5 per 100,000 persons),<sup>13</sup> there are still other factors that go into gun-related suicides and homicides like mental health support, and, most relevant to this report- the mitigation of domestic violence.

New Jersey law prohibits firearm possession and the ability to obtain a handgun purchase permit or Firearms Purchaser Identification Card for individuals who:

- **are convicted of a crime**
- **are convicted of a disorderly person's offense involving domestic violence against a family or household member which may encompass conduct such as harassment, stalking, sexual assault, or burglary, and related acts**

- **are subject to a temporary or final restraining order that explicitly restricts firearm possession**
- **have had firearms seized and not returned under the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act**

These restrictions apply regardless of where the conviction occurred. For example, an individual convicted of a domestic violence offense in another state, such as Minnesota, is likewise prohibited from legally possessing a firearm in New Jersey. Additional disqualifying factors may apply in certain cases, including substance addiction, alcohol dependency and age-based restrictions under state and federal law, all of which may further prohibit firearm ownership.<sup>14 15</sup> If someone does have a firearm when they are legally forbidden from doing so, there are steps survivors and government can take to seize the firearm and potentially impose additional legal consequences.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>13</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/state-stats/deaths/firearms.html?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm\\_mortality/firearm.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/state-stats/deaths/firearms.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm_mortality/firearm.htm)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.womenslaw.org/laws/nj/state-gun-laws/basic-info/i-am-victim-domestic-violence-and-abuser-has-gun-legal>

<sup>15</sup> *The New Jersey Code of Criminal Justice, Chapter 39 and Chapter 58 (N.J.S.2C:39 and N.J.S.2C:58)*

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.womenslaw.org/laws/nj/state-gun-laws/abuser-isnt-supposed-have-gunnow-what>

# Case Selection Process

The Board's Steering Committee reviews data provided by the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) to determine which cases to select for in-depth review by the full Board. The Board reviewed the data from the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) for Domestic Violence homicides for the years 2019, 2020, and 2021.

For these 3 years, there were 115 cases of all domestic violence homicides, with 68 of these cases involving a former or current intimate partner. Of the weapons used, guns were the second most commonly used weapon. They were present in 32% of domestic violence homicides.

Of the 68 cases involving intimate partner homicides, the board chose 9 cases based on the availability of sufficient case data for review. Since this year's review focused on firearm-related domestic violence homicides, cases were limited to those in which firearms were used to cause fatal injuries.

## Case Review and Risk Factor Analysis

In 2003, Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell and her colleagues published a landmark study in the American Journal of Public Health comparing the cases of 220 intimate partner femicide cases with 343 control women who were survivors of domestic violence. The research identified specific risk factors that significantly increase the likelihood of lethality in domestic violence situations, particularly with female victims by male perpetrators.

Since 2020, the Board has examined four risk factors in each of its reviews to assist in identifying opportunities for systemic prevention and intervention. The Board chose to analyze these risk factors because they are most frequently identified in the case reviews. These risk factors include:

***The victims were all women, and the offenders were all men.***

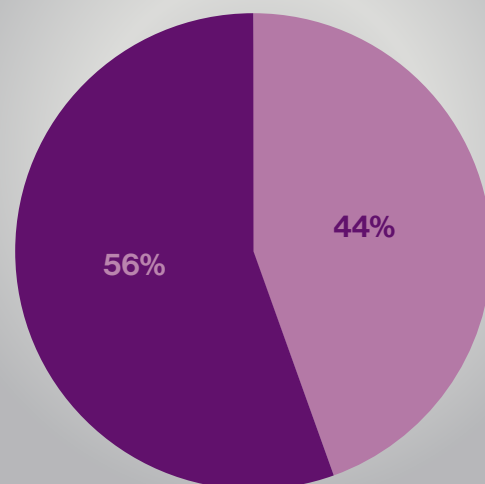
- 1. Criminal history;***
- 2. History of domestic violence;***
- 3. Past or present restraining orders; and***
- 4. Victim was leaving or in the process of ending the relationship.***

In the 9 cases chosen for Board review:

***The victims were all women, and the offenders were all men.***

- 5 of the women were White and 4 were Black. Of this number, one was Hispanic.***
- 5 of the male offenders were Black, 4 were White, and all were non-Hispanic.***
- The average age of the victims was 30 years, with 4 victims between the ages of 19-25, 3 between 26-35 and 2 between 36-41.***
- The average age of offenders was 35 years, with 1 offender between the ages of 19-25, 5 between the ages of 26-35, and 3 between 36-47.***
- 4 of the 9 cases (44%) were murder-suicides.***

### Percent of Homicides/Suicides in Cases Reviewed



■ Homicide

■ Homicide/Suicide

For the 2024 review of the 9 cases, see below for the prevalence of the above listed risk factors.

**Table 1 -** Presence of risk factors in 9 reviewed cases

<b>Risk Factors Present in 2025's Case Review</b>	<b>% present in this year's case selection</b>
<b>Past Criminal History</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Past Domestic Violence</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Past or Present Restraining Orders</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Leaving or Left the Relationship</b>	<b>67%</b>

Six of the 9 cases reviewed contained a history of criminal violence and domestic violence. Restraining orders, either past or present, were identified in 4 of the cases. For the 4th factor, reports or interviews with family and friends indicated the victims were leaving or planning to leave the male offenders in 6 cases. As stated in previous reports, it is well known that when a victim

leaves (or plans to leave), this is considered the most dangerous time as the abuser fears losing his power and control.

In three out of nine cases, the offender owned multiple firearms. In six out of nine cases, there were previous domestic violence incidents reported to law enforcement. Not all previous incidents involved physical violence, however, there was coercion and control.

Two other risk factors that contributed to more than half (56%) the cases, were past criminal history and substance abuse. Substance use is present somewhere between 40%-60% of domestic violence incidents and may lead to, or exacerbate existing, other factors including mental health issues.<sup>17</sup> The perpetrator had past criminal history in 5 of the cases.

It is important to mention, a follow-up to Dr. Campbell's 2002 research was conducted in 2022 to update these risk factors by taking into account structural racism among other issues, for culturally appropriate risk assessments and the prevention of intimate partner homicide.<sup>18</sup> The Board looks forward to the results of the study and how it will affect risk factors of domestic violence in future case reviews.

## Systemic Barriers Identified

Firearm related intimate partner violence remains a critical public health and safety issue.<sup>19</sup> Although New Jersey maintains strong firearm laws and one of the lowest firearm death rates nationally, the Board's case reviews continue to reveal systemic vulnerabilities. These include illegal firearm access, institutional gaps, cross-state trafficking, and limited survivor awareness of protections.

Preventing domestic violence homicides requires coordinated law enforcement, survivor-centered services, early risk identification, firearm removal, and accountability focused interventions. The Board remains committed to advancing data driven prevention strategies to reduce future loss of life.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.discoverynj.org/domestic-violence-and-substance-abuse/>

<sup>18</sup> Messing JT, AbiNadir M, Bent-Goodeley T, Campbell J (2022) *Preventing Intimate Partner Homicide: The Long Road Ahead, Homicide Studies*

<sup>19</sup> <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/2025/why-is-gun-violence-a-public-health-epidemic>

# Recommendations

1. The Board recommends the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence partner with local communities to develop bystander awareness education. The focus of the education should be safe methods of intervention in situations where a person demonstrates signs or behaviors of potential violence, control, or coerciveness against an intimate partner. The programs should be tailored to meet the norms of various communities and involve community leaders in the design and implementation to assure culturally appropriate information is available.
2. The Board recommends the Department of Children and Families and the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence provide an educational series for victims and bystanders of domestic violence. The series should be available at locations most accessible to the community throughout New Jersey.
3. The Board has observed the possession of multiple firearms by DV offenders as an indicator of heightened concern for future use in a domestic violence incident and recommends the New Jersey Superior Family Division and Municipal Court judges be informed of any use and/or ownership of firearms during all court proceedings involving prior domestic disputes.
4. The Board recommends the New Jersey legislature provide the New Jersey State Parole Board more funding. The funding should focus on preventive domestic violence services as data shows one out of three parolees released have a history of intimate partner violence offenses on their record.
5. The Board recommends the Attorney General (AG) offer more confidential support services to law enforcement professionals for domestic violence issues, as well as, mental health, and/or substance abuse issues to prevent any bias or retaliation to a victim or anyone associated to the victim when a domestic violence incident occurs within their precinct, division or office by a co-worker, or someone related or associated to a co-worker.
6. The Board recommends the Attorney General re-evaluate the domestic violence training for current law enforcement officers and new recruits throughout New Jersey. The AG should collaborate with the Coalition to End Domestic Violence to develop a curriculum that would bolster their officer's communication, observation and assessment competencies when responding to domestic violence disputes and prevent any bias or retaliation to a victim or anyone associated with the victim when a domestic violence incident occurs within their precinct, division or office by a co-worker, or someone related or associated to a co-worker.
7. The Board recommends the Department of Health, and the Department of Community Affairs reinforce the practice of screening patients suspected of being a victim of domestic violence while in the care of a hospital, clinic, or other healthcare provider. The screening should occur with the patient alone and in private.
8. The Board recommends the Department of Health require hospitals to include mandatory annual training for all licensed professionals on "Screening Patients for Domestic Violence Victimization" and provide an annual training on bystander intervention for all employees including housekeeping, kitchen staff, and other ancillary personnel who may be unaware they witnessed a domestic violence incident or may be unfamiliar with how to address this type of the situation. Training such staff would prepare them to recognize the signs of domestic violence and take the appropriate actions.

# 2024 Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board Members

**Asia D. Smith** is a certified advocate that has been nationally recognized as an allied justice professional and subject matter expert in the field of family violence specializing in intimate partner related homicides, strangulation, lethality assessments, preventative and intervention strategies. Asia utilizes her expertise to assist in investigations, prosecutions and justice seeking domestic violence cases to fundamentally improve victim services and enhance law enforcement responses. Asia has been appointed by the governor to several statewide boards over her career including the NJ Governor's Advisory Council Against Sexual Violence and is currently the Chair of the NJ Domestic Violence Fatality-Near Fatality Review Board.

**Thomas H. Dilts, JSC** (Retired) has been a board member since 2011, Co-Chair since 2014. New Jersey Superior Court Judge 1991-2011; Presiding Judge Family Division 2001-2008; Past Chair of the New Jersey Domestic Violence Working Group; Co-Chair of the Joint Task Force on Children and Domestic Violence; Past President of Court Appointed Special Advocates of New Jersey; Chair and Founder of the Children's Hope Initiative.

**Susan Rovi, PhD**, retired from the Department of Family Medicine, UMDNJ (now Rutgers) in Newark in 2012. Earned her doctorate in Sociology at Rutgers, qualifying in the Study of Gender and Research Methods. Often employing a multi-method approach to research projects, Sue has authored numerous publications and reports on a broad array of family medicine issues, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and child and elder abuse and neglect. For many years, she was an active volunteer-advocate with the Bergen County Rape Crisis Center and currently enjoys being a Trustee on her local library Board. Dr. Rovi has been a Resource Member on the Board since its inception in 1999.

**John Nardi** began his career as a permanency case worker, and later a supervisor with DCPD previously known as DYFS. John's prior experiences working with families in need, at-risk youth, liaison to the NJ Family Court-Camden Vicinage, and as a

Team Lead with the Office of Quality which provided quality improvement and case practice support for local, and county DCPD offices allowed him to gain a vast knowledge of the Department of Children and Families' practices and policies. John joined the Division on Women in 2016 to become the Program Coordinator of the NJ Domestic Violence Fatality-Near Fatality Review Board.

**Bill Zaorski** (Retired) retired in 2011 as a Deputy Attorney General in the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice after more than 30 years in governmental service. He is a member of the State Domestic Violence Fatality & Near Fatality Review Board. While with the Division of Criminal Justice, he served on the State Domestic Violence Working Group, the Advisory Council on Domestic Violence and Municipal Court Practice Committee. He was the New Jersey Domestic Violence Resource Prosecutor with the Violence Against Women Resource Prosecutor Program. Upon his retirement, he was commended by Gov. Chris Christie for his efforts in developing or coordinating the development of policies & procedures for prosecutors & law enforcement officers to protect victims of domestic violence. The New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women honored him with its Law Enforcement Award in 2000 for his efforts in the development of domestic violence training modules for law enforcement. He is a member of the Animal Law Committee of the State Bar Association. Before joining the Division of Criminal Justice, he served as an assistant county prosecutor in Monmouth County.

**Robert D. Laurino**, representing the County Prosecutors Association of NJ, has been a member of the Essex County Prosecutors Office since 1980, serving in every capacity from general trial attorney to Acting Prosecutor. He presently chairs the NJ Attorney General's Task Force on Clergy Abuse. Mr. Laurino has overseen his office's special victims, child abuse, and domestic violence units. He has completed over 100 jury trials. A cum laude graduate of Villanova University, Mr. Laurino received a master's degree from Rutgers University and law degree from Seton Hall University School of Law. He is certified by the Supreme Court of NJ as a Criminal Trial Attorney.

**Anna Martínez**, Director, New Jersey Division on Women. Ms. Martínez currently serves as the Director of the Division on Women within the New Jersey Department of Children and Families. Anna oversees the administration of federal and state funding for the following areas of work: domestic and sexual violence services, culturally specific programming, economic empowerment, gender equity, and workforce development and sexual violence prevention. Prior to joining state government, Ms. Martínez served in President Obama's Administration in leadership roles in several components of the United States Department of Justice and in the White House supporting the White House Violence Against Women Advisor. Anna is originally from Edison, New Jersey. She received her B.A. from the University of Virginia and her M.A. from Columbia University.

**Mildred Mendez** is currently employed by the NJ Department of Health and was appointed to the New Jersey Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board in March 2021. Millie is passionate about promoting equitable access to healthcare and social services. She is a seasoned professional with over two decades of experience in program development, management and policy advocacy within public health agencies and community organizations and has many years of experience working with survivors of domestic violence in a variety of settings including the Hispanic Family Center of Southern NJ, as an administrator overseeing their DV program, as the Director of the Safe Options Project at A Woman's Place in Doylestown, PA, and as Coordinator.

**Beatriz Oesterheld** is a prominent community leader, influential change agent, and capable administrator with expertise in developing and managing vital, high-impact community programs and initiatives. Since February of 2010, Beatriz has served as the Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Community Affairs Resource Center (CARC) in Asbury Park, Freehold Borough, and Lakewood, Ocean County. Beatriz holds leadership positions with several organizations. She is a board member of the VNA Community Health Center, vice president of the Latino Action Network, and board member of the Latino American Association. In addition, she is a member of the Governor's Council for Disability and is the chair of the Interagency Lead Task Force at the state. Beatriz is also a member of the Fatality--Near Fatality Review Board. Beatriz holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Puerto Rico, and a Non-Profit Management Certificate from Brookdale Community College.

**Roy McGeady** served as a Municipal Court Judge in multiple Courts from 1983 until 2017. He was the Presiding Judge at th Bergen County Municipal Courts (1999 - 2017). Chair of the Conference of Presiding Municipal Judges (2012 - 2013). Chair of Supreme Court Municipal Practice Committee (2014 - 2015). He was a lecturer at the NJ State Bar Institute of Continuing Legal Education and Garden State Continuing Legal Education (2000 - 2017). Lecturer to New Judge Orientation (2005 - 2017). Member of Supreme Court Evidence Committee (2015 - 2017).

**Eileen Allen**, MSN, RN, FN-CSA, SANE-A. Eileen is a registered nurse with experience in a variety of clinical settings. In 1996, She was recruited to create the first Sexual Assault Response Team in New Jersey. She served as the Coordinator of the Forensic Nurse Examiner Program for 25 years. Since 2004, Eileen has taught clinical forensic courses at Monmouth University including Sexual Assault Examination, Interpersonal Violence, Forensic Pathology and Death Investigation has contributed to multiple research articles and textbook chapters. In 2023, Eileen began work as the Forensic Nurse Consultant for the Division of Criminal Justice and joined the NJDVFNFRB.

**Christina N. Pressey**. Mrs. Pressey has been a member of the New Jersey State Judiciary for the last 12 years and has served the Camden Vicinage in the capacity of an Assistant Division Manager for the last 7 years. Currently, as the Assistant Family Division Manager, Mrs. Pressey provides oversight for the matrimonial dissolution and domestic violence dockets. She is a graduate of Howard University, Washington DC, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice. After college, Mrs. Pressey began her professional career by serving the citizens of Burlington & Camden Counties as both a supervisor and advocate for the Prosecutor's Office of Victim Witness Advocacy. During her 12 years of service at the county level, Ms. Pressey was a certified instructor for the Division of Criminal Justice Academy at Sea Girt and the former Burlington County Police Academy. Christina was appointed to the NJDVFNFRB in 2024.

**Dana Gagliardi** began her career with the New Jersey Probation Department in October 1989 and was appointed to her current position of Vicinage Assistant Chief Probation Officer in 2016. Dana's position provides oversight of Domestic Violence, Sex Offenders, Mental health, Juvenile, PTI, Collections and Community Service units. She is a member of the municipal and statewide Domestic Violence Working Groups and was appointed to NJDVFNFRB in 2023.

**Cierra Hart** is a survivor advocate for survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual violence. With nearly two decades of experience, she is the Director of Advocacy, Housing, and Economic Justice at the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence and a national consultant for the National Network to End Domestic Violence's Housing Consortium. Cierra provides advocacy, training, and support for advocates and survivors, focusing on housing and economic justice initiatives. Her work includes expanding housing access, preventing homelessness, and developing domestic violence programs. Recognized nationally, Cierra is committed to fighting discrimination and empowering survivors to find their voices. Cierra has been on the NJDVFNFRB since 2023.

**Craig Robin**

Office of the Public Defender

**Dawn Roane**

Department of Children and Families

**Patrick Sheridan**

Office of the State Medical Examiners

**Nelson Troche**

Department of Human Services

**Dr. Cynthia Lischick**

Cognitive Psychologist

**Kimberly Cavanaugh**

Chief- New Jersey State Parole

**Wil DuBose**

NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence

**Lt. Jason Fretz**

Gloucester Township PD

**DSFC. Lt. Keith Hamlin**

NJ State Police

**Jeanna Korzun**

Department of Children and Families - Division on Women

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