



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW

806 S. College St.
Springfield, IL 62704

217.789.2830
FatalityReview@ilcadv.org
<https://dvfr.illinois.gov>

FAQ's

What is the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative/Act?

The Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative in Illinois was borne out of a collaboration between policy makers, city and state elected officials, researchers and advocates across the State in an effort to reduce and prevent domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities through case analysis, review, and reform. Through this collaboration, the *Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Act* (750 ILCS 62) was drafted, establishing a formalized process for domestic violence fatality review. The Act was signed into law in August 2021.

What is the purpose of Domestic Violence Fatality Review (DVFR)?

The primary purpose of DVFR under the Act are to:

- 1) reduce domestic violence, domestic violence related fatalities and near fatalities in this State;
- 2) address disparate and discriminatory practices and attitudes in the systems that interact with domestic violence victims, survivors, and offenders;
- 3) reduce the cost on society of domestic violence and domestic violence related fatalities; and
- 4) improve community and systemic responses to domestic violence by fostering points of intervention and support that are effective, coordinate, collaborative, consistent, just, and equitable

How is the DVFR initiative organized?

The DVFR Act creates the Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee - a 35-member multi-disciplinary, multiagency group – as a committee of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority Board. The role of the Statewide Committee is to establish and implement regional review teams across the State and to provide training, guidance, and technical support to those teams. The Statewide Committee will also collect and compile policy recommendations from regional teams and report them to the Governor and General Assembly every two years.

The Statewide Committee has two co-chairs - elected by the members, and two full-time staff members – a Director and a Project Coordinator employed by the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence. A member of the Statewide Committee and/or Statewide Committee staff will act as a liaison between the Statewide Committee and regional review teams.

What is a regional review team?

A regional review team is a multiagency and multidisciplinary group that forms within the boundaries of judicial districts throughout the State to review domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities within their jurisdiction. Although the regions are organized by circuit court boundaries, review teams may elect to divide into sub-teams that are county specific, jurisdiction specific, or neighborhood specific, for example.

What is the role of the regional review team?

The regional review team's role is to review individual cases of domestic violence that resulted in a fatality or near fatality and trace prior systemic interventions and community outreach to:

- 1) examine how systems have responded to individual experiences;
- 2) examine barriers to safety, justice, self-determination, and equity;
- 3) identify both systemic and community gaps and barriers in communication, coordination, and response;

- 4) identify gaps and barriers to effective and equitable responses that promote safety, stability, well-being, healing and accountability;
- 5) consider alternate and more effective responses;
- 6) develop recommendation for greater coordinated and improved systemic response; and
- 7) develop policy recommendations and/or prevention initiatives to address domestic violence.

What is a pioneer team?

The first cohort of regional teams are referred to as pioneer teams. The pioneer cohort will include between four and seven sites that have agreed to form in this early group and will be among the first teams to review cases. The Statewide Committee will work closely with the pioneer sites as they encounter challenges and find solutions that will help to inform and guide the policy-making process for future regional teams.

How are teams formed? Who will gather all the team players?

Team formation and the designation of a team lead will be jurisdiction specific. In some jurisdictions, a person may volunteer to lead and begin convening a group. For instance, specific agencies have taken the lead in gathering a group of professionals for formation. In other areas, DVFR staff have worked with the local Family Violence Coordinating Council. DVFR staff can also provide support and assistance in recruiting members as needed.

Who serves on a regional team?

The DVFR Act requires that certain members, or their designee, be a part of each regional team. Some examples are listed below. For the full list, please see 750 ILCS 62/50.

- State's Attorney/ASA
- Public Defender/APO
- Coroner/medical examiner
- Sheriff, Deputy Sheriff, Chief of Police or other law enforcement
- Social service provider for domestic violence victims
- Social service provider for domestic violence offenders, if available in region
- Civil legal services lawyer
- *at least two of the following:* public health official, physician, nurse, mental health professional, circuit judge, elected official, paramedic, clergy, public housing official, alcohol or substance abuse treatment provider, child welfare professional, public- school administrator, representative from state college, researcher, survivor or family member of a victim/survivor

How will teams know which members to invite to the full team vs. on an as needed basis?

It is important to distinguish which members are necessary for a permanent position for your community. The list of "two or more members" set out in 750 ILCS 62/50 (above) allows for a very diverse team, however it is not necessary to have each of those professionals sit on the full team at every review. It may be beneficial for some of those professionals to sit on the full team and for some of them to be invited to a specific case. For example, it may be vital to have a mental health expert or physician hold a permanent position on the full team if drug use is high in the community and to invite a school official only if there are children involved or impacted. The invitation of members that are not required is entirely up to how the specific team wants to be structured, as long as the requirements set out in 750 ILCS 62/50 are met.

If one member is unavailable, can another representative of that organization be sent in their place?

Yes, this is encouraged. Though all original team members will receive case review training provided by the Statewide Committee, it is important to have the perspective of an office or organization in the review of each case. Each member and any visiting reviewers or guests are required to sign a confidentiality agreement upon discussion of any identifying case information.

Will teams have support?

Yes, the Statewide Committee and its staff are available for training, research, technical assistance, guidance, and some administrative support (750 ILCS 62/20). The administrative support of each team will be specific to the way that each team decides to organize itself. Team members may choose to divide duties, recruit an intern, solicit assistance from an established group coordinator or team lead or seek funding to carry out the work of the team, if funding is available. Members serving as liaisons between the Statewide Committee and the regional team may also be willing to provide additional support.

Will teams receive training?

Once team members have been identified, regional teams will be trained to conduct fatality reviews of individual cases. This may include a mock case review and/or webinar, vicarious and secondary trauma, and other training the team or Statewide Committee may deem necessary. Training will be provided through and funded by the Statewide Committee.

How many times does the team have to meet? Can meetings be virtual?

Teams will need to meet **at least** quarterly and as many times as necessary to be able to establish a timeline and walk through the facts and circumstances of each case. There is nothing prohibiting teams from meeting virtually, though occasional in-person meetings are encouraged and may be necessary in some areas in order to appropriately distribute case material.

How many and what kind of cases are regional teams required to review?

Regional DVFR teams are required to review a minimum of two eligible cases per year. Cases eligible to review under the Act include a fatality or near-fatality that includes at least one of the following:

- **Homicide:** victim's death was caused by offender, or offender's death was caused by survivor
- **Suicide:** offender, survivor, or victim attempted or completed suicide
- **Familicide:** deaths of victim and other members of victim's family were caused by offender
- **Near-fatality:** survivor caused the near fatality of offender, or offender causes the near fatality of survivor
- **Other cases:** any other case involving domestic violence by a majority vote of regional review team members if it advances the purposes of the Act (750 ILCS 62/62a-5)

Are there reporting requirements?

Regional teams will draft biennial reports and reform recommendations to send to the Statewide Committee. The Statewide Committee will review and analyze the recommendations and any data for trends, strengths, and vulnerabilities; and report the recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on a biennial basis.

The Statewide Committee will share model policy and procedure guidelines with each team, assist in any case reviews at the regional team's request, and collect annual reports.

What about confidentiality?

Domestic violence fatality reviews are confidential (750 ILCS 62/75). Fatality review often necessitates possessing confidential information. Each regional team member participating in any portion of a case review must sign a confidentiality agreement with copies to be housed by the Statewide Committee. Confidential information held by a regional review team is not subject to disclosure by the regional team under the Freedom of Information Act, subpoena or discovery nor is it admissible as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding. Review team members cannot be compelled to release or disclose any confidential information learned or obtained under their official duties as part of a domestic violence fatality review team under the DVFR Act. Meetings of a DVFR team are exempt from the Open Meetings Act.