



**SYSTEM ALERT:  
ARIZONA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**Prosecutor's View**

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As a prosecutor, I see first-hand the suffering that domestic violence brings to victims and their families. And I feel the frustration shared by victims, law-enforcement officers and everybody else who is working so hard to convict and punish those who abuse their so-called "loved ones." But while my main task is to pursue offenders, I think the main focus of our reform efforts should be on enhancing victim participation.

The biggest challenge facing Arizona in battling domestic violence is creating an environment that increases victim participation in the criminal-justice process. Reluctance on the part of DV victims is not new. Many fail to pursue their cases because they depend on the offender financially, or they're afraid of retaliation. But recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court have placed more emphasis on defendants' right to confront their accusers: The result is that prosecuting domestic violence cases without victim participation is now nearly impossible.

We prosecutors must work with law-enforcement officers, shelter staff and other front-line service providers to help them give victims an accurate picture of what we in the system can and cannot do for them. Too many victims come to the system with unrealistic expectations; some think that calling 911 is all they really need to do. We must be able to inform victims what's needed for successful prosecution – such as physical evidence, witnesses, or photos – and let them know that even cases that appear to be "he-said, she-said" standoffs can be won with proper evidence.

This will take more and better training for law enforcement, 911 operators, prosecutors and others. I think there's a particular need for cross-training, so that professionals and service providers all across the system are learning and discussing the same issues. For example, some advocates and others tell prosecutors that we disempower victims if we pursue a case that they'd prefer not to prosecute; others insist that we should prosecute every case we can regardless of what the victim wants.

Working through these and other issues is essential if we are going to make progress against domestic violence – which is certainly among the most difficult types of cases for the system to handle. Prosecutors all over Arizona face these challenges every day. We – and, most importantly, the victims – need all the help we can get.