



“There would be increase in intimate violence and family (violence), child abuse and neglect. And an increase in various source of stressors – depression, anxiety issues, all sorts of things.”

– Robert Mendelsohn, Clinical Director, Southern California Counseling Center Domestic Violence Program, on the impact of further budget cuts on the courts

Created in 1993, Los Angeles’ domestic violence courts work to protect our community’s most vulnerable women and children from the impacts of intimate violence. Often, victims here face multiple economic and social challenges, and many are homeless.

Further proposed LA Superior Court budget cuts come at an extremely bad time for victims and domestic violence service providers because of a sharp drop in funding from both state and local government as well as a difficult economy for non-profit support organizations to raise funds to fill the gap. The result is that domestic violence victims are left without access to the system that they need to protect themselves from their abusers. Experts agree that losing access to the system will push more women to keep themselves and their families in dangerous situations, and increase the incidence of domestic violence in general.

Effect of Cuts on Victims: Voices in the System

Recent cuts to the court system, while drastic, can appear deceptively minimal. They effect support services such as child care, child services, substance abuse programs, shelters, non profits, CalWorks and many others that make it feasible for domestic violence victims to use the system. For the domestic violence victims who rely on this network of services for survival, more obstacles getting through a complex system can have layered and far-reaching repercussions.

“There are just less judges, less interpreters, so trying to get a case through the court system just taking longer...Legal Aid is overwhelmed, so trying to get help with restraining order documentation is more difficult. The court system is a very complex, daunting system...so without support system or someone there to help navigate it, it’s just overwhelming.”

– Ben Schirmer, executive director of Rainbow Services

Cuts and non-profit understaffing have resulted in an advocacy shortage, meaning there is often no one to accompany abuse victims and follow through on restraining orders and other documentation. Non-profit directors can’t meet demand, and report clients are missing court appointments because they simply don’t have the staff to go with them and follow through.

The pressures caused by not being able to get a hearing quickly in L.A. County have led to increased domestic violence and real-world ramifications on children. Often times, domestic violence survivors who have just escaped their abuser already have many obstacles (little money, lack of transportation) and now we are adding an extra barrier with limited court access.

“It’s a really scary time for them,” said Angelina Coe, executive director of Women and Children’s Crisis Center, of the organization’s service recipients. “And the court system also is a scary thing... We need to be more aware of the need for that advocacy and support for victims within the judicial system. Because they’re already terrified, they need people on their side in the system and domestic violence shelters cannot do it alone.”