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Domestic violence deaths rising again in Maryland after 2023 decline

Those working with survivors say there are gaps in training, enforcement and judicial consistency across the state



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Domestic violence-related deaths in Maryland have risen for two consecutive years, reaching 47 in 2025 after falling sharply from the unusually high levels recorded earlier in the decade.

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence counted 38 deaths in 2023 and 41 in 2024. That followed three years in which the toll remained in the 50s: 56 deaths in 2020, 58 in 2021 and 56 in 2022.

The increase comes as other categories of violent crime have fallen sharply and amid several deadly domestic violence cases in Baltimore County. Among them: a former police lieutenant who fatally shot his wife in Perry Hall, and a Catonsville man who killed his 21-year-old girlfriend before turning the gun on himself in a downtown Columbia parking garage.

“It’s been really horrific in Baltimore County, and inexplicable in some ways,” Laure Ruth, MNADV’s public policy director, said in January at a General Assembly hearing.

Ruth was testifying on the Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act, a bill that would have required guns to be confiscated from domestic-violence suspects during temporary protective orders, not just final ones. It didn’t pass.

Some lawmakers questioned the burden the proposal would place on police, including requiring officers to confiscate firearms after temporary orders and potentially return them if final protective orders were not granted. The bill’s sponsor, Anne Arundel County Del. Sandy Bartlett, said she plans to try again next year.

Last year, six of Baltimore County’s 28 total murders were domestic-related murder-suicides, police said. Two of them happened within one week.

The Baltimore County Police Department told The Sun it has precinct-level domestic violence coordinators who follow up on protective orders and connect survivors with resources. The agency said it is part of the county’s three-year-old Working Group on Resource Coordination to Support Survivors of Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Domestic Abuse.

“When circumstances warrant, additional intervention may include conducting a lethality assessment or pursuing an Extreme Risk Protective Order to address access to firearms when an individual poses a danger to themselves or others,” said police spokesperson Joy Lepola-Stewart.

The recent killings do not establish that shortcomings in those systems contributed to the deaths. But advocates point to broader concerns about whether protective orders are consistently effective and whether police and judges receive enough continuing training.

There can be “very little consistency ... in how judges will handle the same type of case,” said Silas Stephens, program manager for Court Watch Montgomery, which advocates for survivors by collecting data on domestic violence cases.

Zuberi “Zu” Williams, a retired District Court judge in Montgomery County, is among those trying to improve training for those in the courtroom when the stakes are high. He was so impressed by a domestic violence training held by the nonprofit National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges that he became an instructor, traveling to other states along with several other Maryland judges.

The training emphasized “coming from a place of disrupting this repeated cycle of domestic violence, and using the judge’s tools to do so,” Williams said.

While many states require judges to attend those family violence trainings, Maryland allows judges to take electives that do not necessarily address domestic violence as part of their continuing legal education, Williams said.

Judges — while always being consistent with the law — “have to lead in these moments,” Williams said.

The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services said the Police Training & Standards Commission mandates domestic violence training, although Maryland does not require continuing training devoted specifically to domestic violence. The commission does require continuing training on related topics, including sex offenses, stalking and human trafficking.

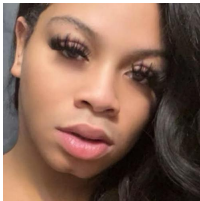
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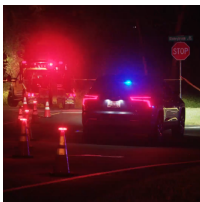
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