



Report Highlights

Challenges in Louisiana’s Effort to Address Domestic Violence

MICHAEL J. “MIKE”
WAGUESPACK, CPA

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Why We Conducted This Audit

We reviewed challenges Louisiana faces in its efforts to address domestic violence. We conducted this audit because, in 2017, Louisiana had the second-highest rate of female homicide in the nation and the fifth-highest in 2018, with approximately 60% of female homicide victims killed by intimate partners in each year. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated domestic violence, as abuse victims were often trapped in homes with their abusers during stressful times caused by self-isolation, quarantine measures, and job loss.

Domestic violence, sometimes called intimate partner violence, is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.

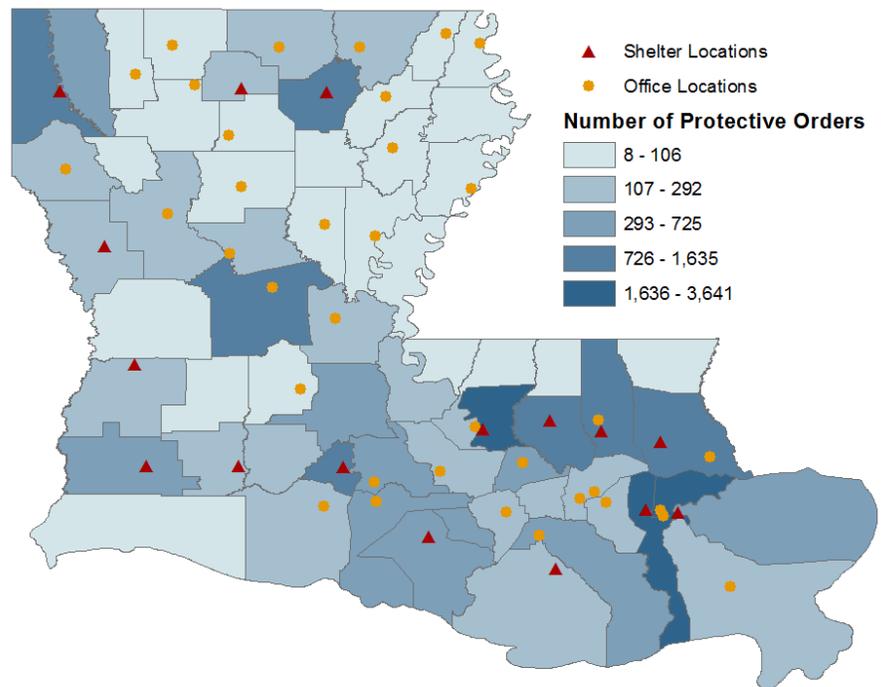
Source: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

What We Found

Overall, we found that Louisiana faces multiple challenges in its efforts to address domestic violence. These challenges include gaps in services for victims, insufficient and inflexible funding, strategies to protect victims not being consistently implemented, lack of oversight for intervention programs for perpetrators, and lack of training for certain entities involved in addressing domestic violence. Specifically, we found the following:

- **Lack of domestic violence shelter beds and support services to meet the needs of all victims is an ongoing challenge in Louisiana.** More funding, consistent funding levels, and more flexibility in how funds can be spent could help improve service delivery to victims. For example, there is no domestic violence shelter in central Louisiana, and shelters across Louisiana had an average of 2,659 unmet requests for shelter per year during federal fiscal years 2015 through 2020. The exhibit (right) shows the number of protective orders by parish and the locations of domestic violence shelters and offices for calendar year 2020.

Number of Protective Orders by Parish and Domestic Violence Shelter and Provider Office Locations
Calendar Year 2020



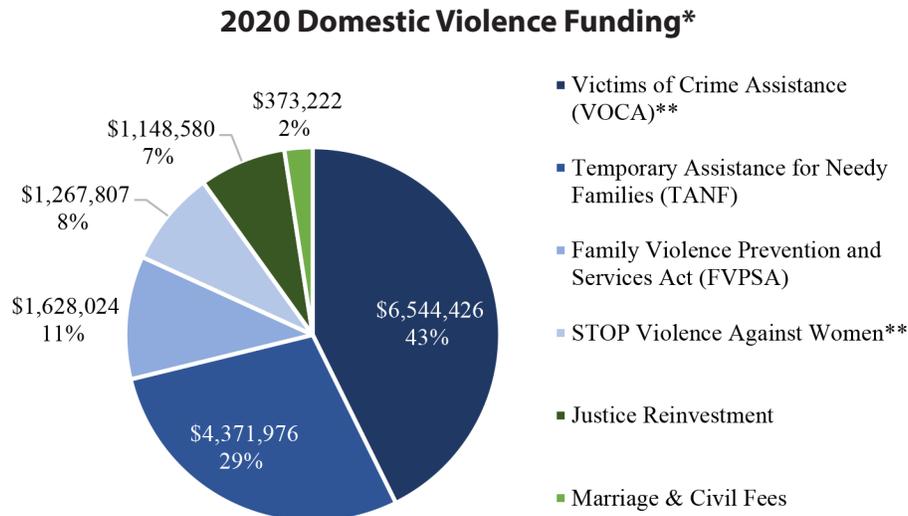
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided by the Louisiana Protective Order Registry and based on survey responses from all 16 domestic violence shelter providers.

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What We Found (Cont.)

In addition, unlike other states, only 10% of domestic violence funding comes from state sources. Approximately \$13.8 million (90.1%) of the \$15.3 million in annual domestic violence funding administered by the state came from federal grants in 2020, as shown in the exhibit below.



*Based on state or federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020

**Estimated totals based on historical average percent of federal award spent on domestic violence. LCLE has not yet disbursed all of the FFY 2020 grant award amounts.

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information from LCLE and DCFS.

- **State laws intended to protect victims, such as the issuance of protective orders, are not consistently implemented across the state.** For example, protective orders may not always be served to abusers for a variety of reasons, and according to the Supreme Court and sheriffs, not all sheriff's offices submitted proof of service to the Louisiana Protective Order Registry, as required by state law. In addition, not all sheriff's offices have developed policies and procedures for the firearm relinquishment process as required by law.
- **While state law requires law enforcement training on domestic violence, other entities involved in addressing domestic violence are not required to have such training.** For example, there is no requirement for judges and district attorneys to receive domestic violence training. In addition, the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement (LCLE) has not completed a domestic violence awareness training program required by state law for law enforcement officers. Because domestic violence is a complicated, dynamic issue, education on current best practices could improve how the judicial branch and law enforcement protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Intervention programs for perpetrators, which aim to protect victims and prevent future abuse, have no oversight or consistency across the state.** Unlike domestic violence shelters, which must follow standards and be inspected by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Louisiana has no entity responsible for oversight and monitoring of intervention programs for perpetrators of domestic violence and does not mandate that these programs follow standards that would help ensure consistency and accountability.
- **Awareness efforts in public schools could be strengthened to better identify and prevent domestic violence incidents.** Although state law requires that public schools provide education on dating violence for students and employees, not all Louisiana public schools meet these requirements. As a result, all students may not receive dating violence education or learn how to report instances of dating violence.