

LEGISLATION TO RAISE REVENUE FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES



Funding for services to help victims of domestic violence break free of abusive relationships is an investment in the safety and health of our families, our communities, and especially our children. To address the critical shortage of funding for these vital services across the Commonwealth, PCADV urges the General Assembly to increase the existing fees on marriage licenses and establish a parallel fee on divorce filings dedicated to statewide domestic violence services. This legislation does not impact the General Fund, but does make the safety of our communities a priority.

The lack of adequate funding has resulted in 6,152 unmet requests for domestic violence services last fiscal year. These numbers have very real human consequences.

- 85,643 victims in crisis were served by Pennsylvania's 60 domestic violence programs last year, yet many programs did not have the capacity to help some victims due to a lack of resources.
- The economic recession and federal sequestration has stretched already-strained resources.
- The lethal consequences of domestic violence remind us how critical these services are to victims in need.
 - In 2014, there were 141 domestic violence fatalities in Pennsylvania.
 - 97 of those deaths were victims (4 children), and 44 were perpetrators.

BACKGROUND

- Since 1990, a \$10 surcharge on the marriage license has been dedicated to funding statewide domestic violence services; this amount has **never been increased**.
- The existing \$10 marriage license fee raises \$833,000 per year for domestic violence services.

MARRIAGE LICENSE FEES

The cost of marriage license and divorce filing fees varies by county. Each county establishes its base cost; certain fees¹ are added to that base cost, resulting in the total fee charged.

- In 2014, the cost of a marriage license varied from a low of \$30 (Williamsburg and Wilkes-Barre) to a high of \$80 (Philadelphia, Pittsburg and Lebanon).
- The **average** cost of a marriage license in Pennsylvania is **\$48.00**.
- Thirty-five other states have marriage license fees dedicated to domestic violence/child abuse funding.

DIVORCE FILING FEES

As with marriage licenses, divorce filing costs vary by county; the majority of the fee goes to the county.

- In 2014, the divorce filing fee varied from a low of \$84.00 (Coudersport) to a high of \$375.75 (Carlisle).
- The **average** cost of the divorce filing fee in Pennsylvania is **\$171.00**.
- Low-income people may use the *in forma pauperis* process to waive court filing costs.
- Twelve other states have divorce filing fees dedicated to domestic violence /child abuse funding.

ANTICIPATED REVENUE

PCADV urges the General Assembly to pass legislation that will increase the existing marriage license fee for domestic violence services from the current \$10 to \$35, and dedicate a \$25 fee on divorce filings, generating **nearly \$3 million** more each year for life-saving services for domestic violence victims.

Action Requested:

PCADV urges the General Assembly to increase the existing fees on marriage licenses and establish a parallel fee on divorce filings dedicated to statewide domestic violence services.

¹ There is also a \$11.25 fee for the Judicial Computer System Augmentation/Access to Justice Account.