

**Domestic Violence Homicides
in Rhode Island
2016-2020**



About the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) is a statewide organization dedicated to ending domestic violence. The RICADV was formed in 1979 to support and assist the agencies serving domestic violence victims and their families in Rhode Island and to provide leadership on the issue. The organization strives to create justice for survivors through policy and systems advocacy, and raises awareness about the issue of domestic violence prevention.

In Memory

The RICADV has published this report in memory of the lives lost to domestic violence in our state. It is our hope that the information and recommendations outlined in the report will lead to systemic and social change that will protect victims of domestic violence, hold perpetrators accountable and prevent domestic violence homicides. Our hearts are with the families and friends who have lost their loved ones. We stand in solidarity with you in our mission to end domestic violence.

Resources

The RICADV's member agencies provide a wide array of services for victims, including emergency shelter, support groups, counseling services and assistance with the legal system. For information about your local agency, visit www.ricadv.org.

For information on domestic violence and how you can help, call the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence at 401-467-9940, or visit us online.

The Helpline: 800-494-8100

For 24/7 support, assistance and information, call the confidential Rhode Island statewide Helpline (800-494-8100) to speak with an advocate or use the online chat feature at www.ricadv.org.

Berta Bogran spent the afternoon of Saturday, August 24 in 2019, at her Providence home with family. Moments later, she was fatally shot just outside of her house, in the street, by her estranged husband, Oscar Hudson. After the shooting, Hudson fled to his apartment and shot himself. Berta had told authorities Hudson was threatening her and said, “he’s going to end up killing me.” She tried to protect herself – in early 2019, Berta had filed for a restraining order in Rhode Island Family Court, stating she was being stalked by Hudson and he had installed a tracker on her car. Hudson had also moved in just houses away from Berta’s residence to harass her. Hudson violated the protective order in April 2019 when he appeared at Berta’s residence. In July 2019, Hudson was found guilty by District Court of criminal violation of a restraining order, and received a sentence of a one-year filing, domestic abuse counseling and an additional criminal domestic No Contact Order. The *Protect Rhode Island Families Act*, a law passed in 2017, prohibits domestic abusers convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes or subject to a civil order of protection from possessing firearms. Despite this law and related federal law, Hudson was ultimately not disarmed nor required to comply with gun surrender.¹

Berta Bogran’s tragic death, as well as the 25 other lives lost to domestic violence homicide in the past five years, demonstrates there is much more work to do in Rhode Island to prevent these murders. Research has shown the advances in domestic violence-related laws and expansion of victim services in the 1980s and 1990s led to a decrease in domestic violence homicides. Since that initial decrease, however, the numbers have remained consistent, and our state continues to experience loss of life to domestic violence each year, including in each of the last five years this report covers. Domestic violence homicide cases have been monitored by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) since 1980, the year after the RICADV was established. Although the electronic GPS tracker used by the perpetrator in Berta’s case may not have existed 40 years ago, the same dynamics and patterns abusers use to escalate fear and violence to gain control over victims have sadly remained constant.

The community response to intimate partner violence (IPV) has evolved over time. In 1982, Rhode Island passed a law creating domestic violence restraining orders. In 1988, Rhode Island passed its first law making domestic violence a crime. The federal Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) and landmark Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), enacted in 1984 and 1994 respectively, expanded shelter access and services for victims. Newer laws such as the *Protect Rhode Island Families Act* and R.I.’s 2018 *Red Flag Law* to disarm dangerous individuals have also been steps in the right direction to prevent intimate partner homicides. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asserts IPV is preventable, promoting public health strategies that create safe, supportive conditions in our communities to prevent IPV before it starts, such as those implemented by the RICADV with our longstanding CDC funding and by community organizations funded by Rhode Island’s Deborah DeBare Domestic Violence Prevention Fund (DVVPF).

This homicide report is the second produced by the RICADV, following our first report released in 2016. In addition to statistical data and descriptions of the domestic violence homicides that occurred in R.I. over the past five years – including the COVID-19 pandemic year of 2020 that saw historic increases in calls to our domestic violence hotlines – we have included information about national research, policy trends and best practices. With informed awareness about these continued tragedies and what precedes them, we believe R.I. can adopt more effective policies, laws and public health primary prevention strategies to save the lives of our families, friends and neighbors.

Lucy Rios
Executive Director

John Wesley
Director of Policy and Advocacy

Ian Colomer
Policy and Housing Coordinator

Sara Eckhoff
Community Engagement and Training Manager

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Between 2016 and 2020, 26 people lost their lives to domestic violence homicides in Rhode Island, over the course of 26 incidents. The overwhelming majority of homicides (21) involved perpetrators who killed their intimate partners, or killed bystanders in an incident related to intimate partner violence. Three incidents involved family members, and two incidents involved roommates. In each year, there were between four (4) and seven (7) homicides.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is abuse or aggression one person uses in a romantic relationship to control their partner. “Intimate partner” refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners.

Year	Homicide incidents	Homicide victims	Intimate partner	Family member	Roommate
2016	7	7	6	1	0
2017	4	4	3	1	0
2018	4	4	3	0	1
2019	4	4	3	1	0
2020	7	7	6	0	1
Totals	26	26	21	3	2

Figure 1. Overview of domestic violence homicide incidents in Rhode Island, 2016-2020

Of the 26 domestic violence homicide victims, 81% (21) were killed in an intimate partner homicide incident. Of those victims, 58% (15) were a current or former intimate partner of the perpetrator, and 23% (6) were bystanders killed in an attack on an intimate partner of the perpetrator.

Eight percent (2) of the victims were roommates. Twelve percent (3) of the victims were family members of the perpetrator.

For information about data limitations, see page 18.

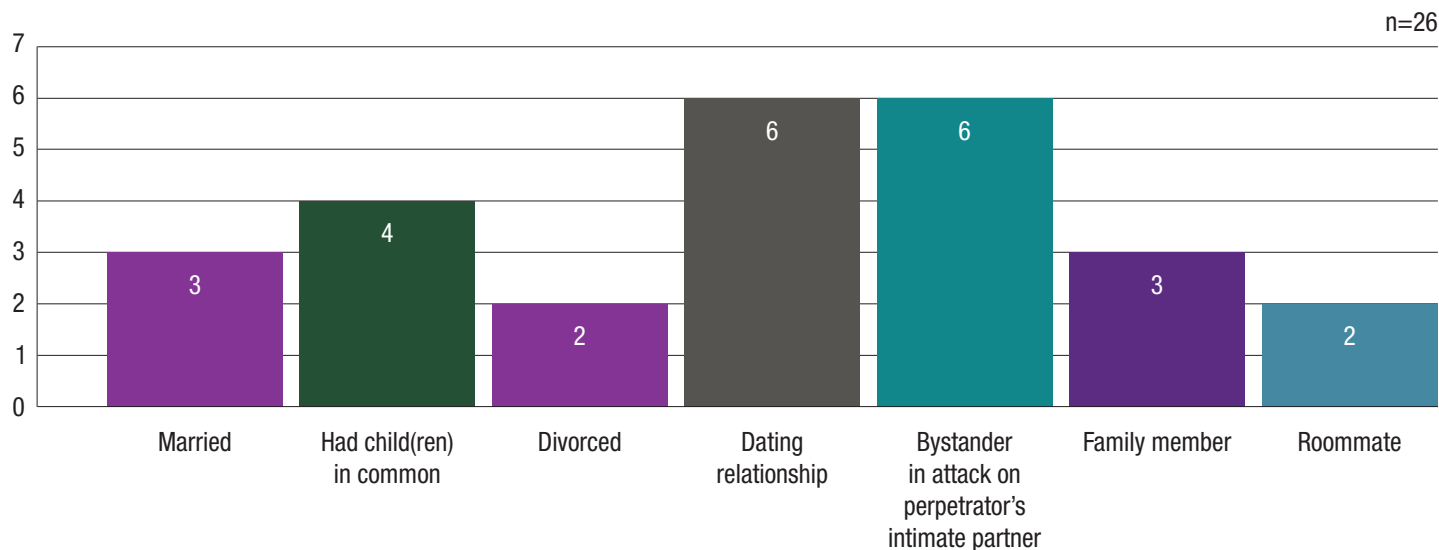


Figure 2. Domestic violence homicide victims, by relationship with perpetrator

Findings

All Rhode Island cities and towns experience domestic violence, with over 5,000 domestic violence arrests occurring each year across our state.* Between 2016 and 2020, domestic violence homicide incidents occurred in 11 different cities and towns in R.I. In terms of absolute numbers, the largest number of incidents occurred in the most populous cities in the state, including Providence (8), Woonsocket (4) and Pawtucket (3). The per 100,000 rate of domestic violence homicides ranged from 2.12 per 100,000 in East Providence to 9.25 per 100,000 in Woonsocket.**

*Annual domestic violence arrest statistics are collected by the R.I. Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit.

**City and town populations are based on the 2020 U.S. Census.

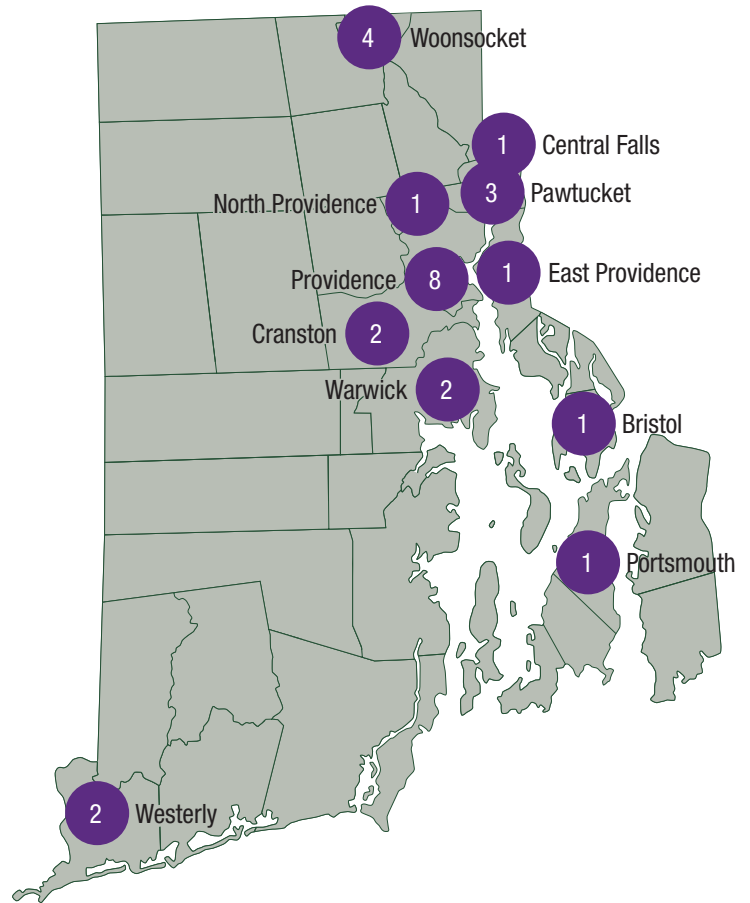


Figure 3. Domestic violence homicide incidents, by location

Of the 21 intimate partner homicide incidents, 71% (15) of homicide victims were female, and 29% (6) of homicide victims were male. Nine percent (2) of perpetrators of these incidents were female and 91% (20) were male. One case included two perpetrators, male and female.

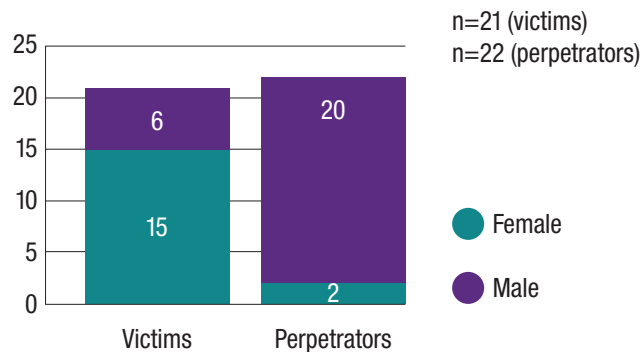


Figure 4. Intimate partner homicide victims and perpetrators, by gender

Of the 21 victims killed in intimate partner homicide incidents, 67% (14) were female intimate partners of a male perpetrator. All incidents in which bystanders were killed involved male perpetrators, with one incident involving male and female perpetrators.

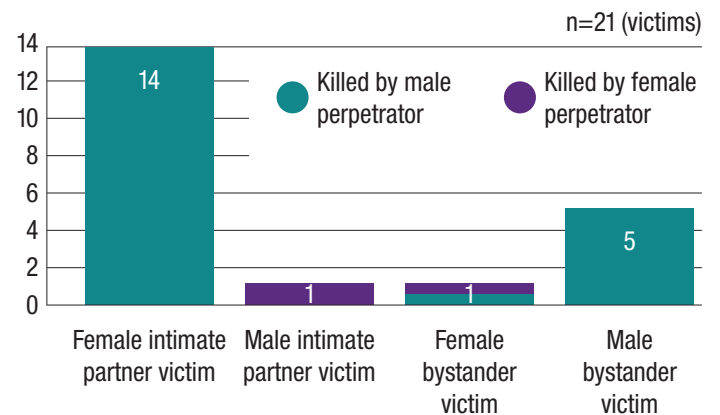


Figure 5. Intimate partner homicide victims, by gender and relationship

The ages of victims killed in intimate partner homicide incidents ranged from 24 to 69 years old, with an average age of 46. The ages of perpetrators of intimate partner homicide incidents ranged from 18 to 73 years old, with an average age of 41.

In the three cases in which the victims were other family members, the ages ranged from 19 to 70 years old, with an average age of 52. The ages of perpetrators in these incidents ranged from 20 to 40 years old, with an average age of 25.

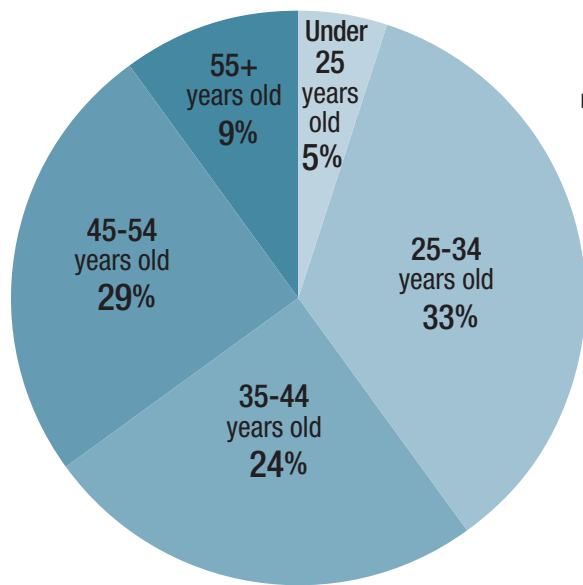


Figure 6. Intimate partner homicide victims, by age

n=21 (victims)
n=22 (perpetrators)

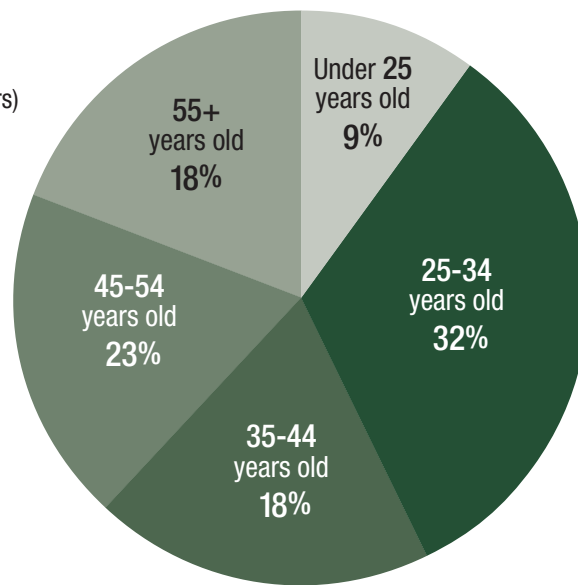


Figure 7. Intimate partner homicide perpetrators, by age

Forty-three percent (9) of intimate partner homicides were committed with firearms. Nineteen percent (4) of victims were killed by being beaten either with hands/fists or a blunt instrument, 19% (4) by stabbing, 10% (2) by strangulation and 10% (2) were killed using a vehicle.

Of the bystanders who were killed in intimate partner homicide incidents, three were killed with firearms, two by stabbing and one by using a vehicle.

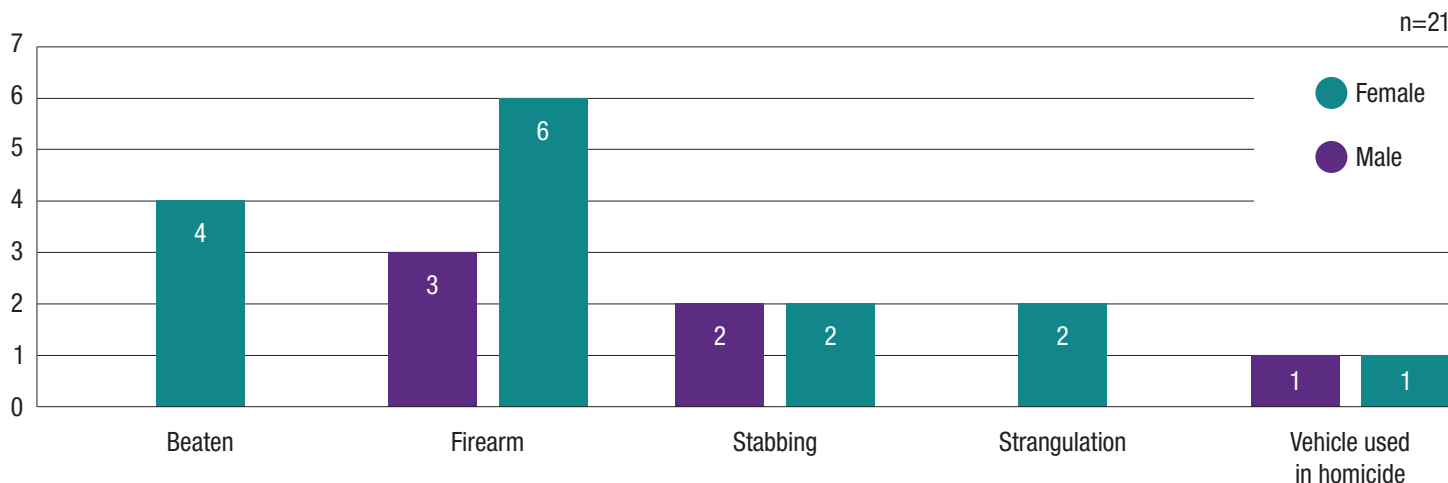


Figure 8. Intimate partner homicide victims, by weapon/method of homicide

Findings

Seven of the cases were reported to have indications of stalking. Examples of stalking might include perpetrator behaviors such as repeatedly calling or otherwise contacting the victim, monitoring the victim’s whereabouts and actions and seeking out the new residence of a victim who had moved to get away from the perpetrator (for more information on stalking as a homicide risk factor, please see page 11). Five cases were reported to involve some degree of estrangement or the victim’s plan to leave the relationship. This could include legal divorce or separation, reports from family members that the victim had confided plans to leave, or evidence the victim had moved away from the perpetrator or sought a civil protective order (for more information on estrangement as a homicide risk factor, please see page 9).

Six of these cases involved the perpetrator making threats to kill the victim and/or the victim’s loved ones. It is likely lethality indicators were present in other cases and not reported to law enforcement or the media, or that, for example, plans to leave and prior threats to kill were only known to the victim and the perpetrator.

Just over half of the perpetrators had previous involvement in domestic violence-related judicial proceedings. Fifty-five percent (12) of the perpetrators were or had been subject to a civil domestic violence restraining order, and 45% (10) of the perpetrators had previously been convicted or pled *nolo contendere* in a domestic violence case. Twenty-seven percent (6) had been charged with violation of a protective order, a potential indicator of stalking. Thirty-two percent (7) of perpetrators had previous criminal domestic violence charges that had been dismissed by the court. In one instance, the perpetrator had domestic violence charges dismissed in two separate cases. In 2016, he murdered his girlfriend and fled the state until he was apprehended one year later in New York City.



Figure 9. Known history of certain lethality factors prior to intimate partner homicide



Figure 10. Intimate partner homicide perpetrators, by previous domestic violence criminal history

Note: Pending arrests and criminal charges may be undercounted due to cases having been expunged. Expungements are particularly relevant to misdemeanor charges and dismissed cases. The data presented is that which was publicly available at the time of the publication of this report.

Of the 22 intimate partner homicide perpetrators, eight have been convicted. Only one of the convictions resulted in murder in the first degree, the most serious homicide charge. In seven cases, charges have been filed and are currently pending in the court system as of the publication of this report.* In the remaining seven cases, the perpetrator died by suicide either during the homicide incident or shortly thereafter.

*Criminal case status current as of March 11, 2022

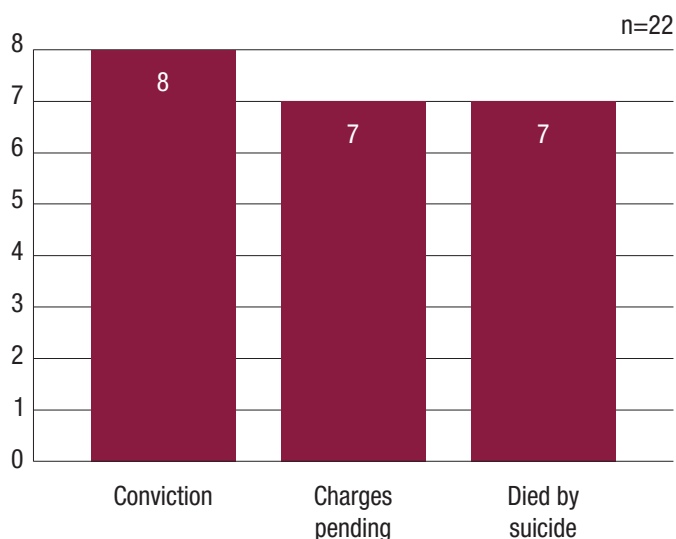


Figure 11. Intimate partner homicide perpetrators, by incident outcome



Figure 12. Intimate partner homicide perpetrators, by homicide charge convicted outcome

Of the eight perpetrators who have been convicted as of the publication of this report, 38% (3) received at least a life sentence to serve. Fifty percent (4) of perpetrators were sentenced to between 20 to 39 years to serve. One perpetrator was sentenced to less than 20 years to serve.

Update: In the RICADV's previous homicide report (covering 2006-2015), eight homicide criminal cases of the 48 total incidents remained pending at the time of the report. As of publication of this report (2016-2020), four of those perpetrators received a life sentence, two perpetrators are serving 50 years in prison and two criminal cases are still pending.

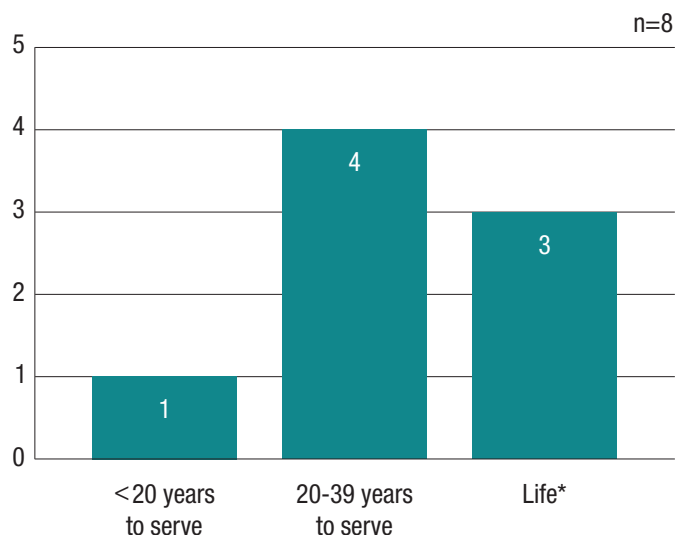


Figure 13. Intimate partner homicide perpetrators, by length of sentence to serve

*This total includes one sentence of life without parole as well as cases where perpetrators were sentenced to additional years to serve on top of a life sentence, or were sentenced to serve more than one life term.

Preventing Domestic Violence Homicides

Domestic violence remains a serious public health issue in the U.S. The most devastating impact of this form of violence is death. Between 2016 and 2020, R.I. made strides in passing legislation to increase safety for domestic violence victims, their families and Rhode Island communities. Areas where R.I. has made progress include expanding protection orders to include pets and children who are not biologically related to the abuser, and passing legislation to further protect victims of stalking, cyberstalking and revenge porn. Additionally, research suggests states with laws prohibiting domestic violence perpetrators from possessing firearms have lower rates of intimate partner homicides than states without such laws.² Between 2016 and 2020, R.I. passed a number of important pieces of gun safety legislation, including the *Protect RI Families Act*, the *Red Flag Law*, the *Julie Lynn Cardinal Act* and laws banning “ghost guns” and bump stocks. In spite of R.I.’s recent successes, the work is not done. There continues to be a concerning link between firearms and domestic violence homicides. Over half of the women who are victims of intimate partner homicide in the U.S. are killed with a gun.³ Moreover, despite national trends showing an overall reduction of intimate partner homicides of women involving knives and other weapons between 2008 and 2017, the rate of women killed by their intimate partner with firearms increased by 15% over the same period.⁴

In 2017, R.I. successfully passed a number of justice reinvestment and criminal justice reform bills, which included the establishment of a screening process for those charged with domestic violence offenses. In May 2019, the Pretrial Services Unit of the R.I. District Court began using the “Domestic Violence Screening Instrument” (DVSI), an evidence-based tool created by the Division of Probation Services in Colorado. The DVSI is used to determine the likelihood those charged with domestic violence crimes will reoffend. Defendants are categorized as either high-risk for reoffending or moderate risk for reoffending based on the results of the DVSI. Judges can take these scores into account when making determinations about any modifications to the defendant’s bail or other conditions, to include protective orders. Of the 1,077 DVSI assessments the Pretrial Services Unit completed in 2020, 718 (66.7%) received scores that placed them in the high-risk category.

The inset text on the following pages highlights some of the important risk factors associated with intimate partner homicide victimization. Research has consistently demonstrated the single best predictor of intimate partner homicide among women is prior domestic violence victimization, but other factors have also been shown to increase intimate partner homicide risk, such as the presence of a firearm, threats to kill the victim, stalking behaviors and prior assaults by strangulation.⁵ Risk assessment tools have proven helpful in predicting the likelihood of future severe and homicidal violence by an intimate partner. The “Danger Assessment,” one of the most common assessment tools, has been used by advocates, medical providers and law enforcement since its creation in 1986. The Danger Assessment is completed with the victim and is intended to be used for safety planning, appropriate service referrals and education. A 2005 study looking at the efficacy of various assessment tools found the Danger Assessment to be an effective tool at predicting future severe violence.⁶ In the fall of 2021, the RICADV welcomed Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell of Johns Hopkins University, creator of the Danger Assessment, to Rhode Island to train advocates, law enforcement and others on the importance of recognizing lethality risks and how to utilize this screening tool.

HOMICIDE RISK FACTOR

The Perpetrator Has Access to Guns

The presence of a firearm can play a significant role in escalating violence to a lethal level. Women in abusive relationships are five times more likely to be killed if their abusive partner has access to a firearm.⁷ Firearms can be used by abusers to establish and maintain power and control in the relationship, and to inflict emotional and psychological harm on the victim regardless of whether they are used to explicitly threaten the victim.⁸ Of the 26 domestic violence homicides that occurred in R.I. between 2016 and 2020, 42% involved a firearm.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, gun sales increased significantly, both in R.I. and nationally. At the onset of the pandemic, between February and March 2020, R.I. saw a 132% increase in federal background check requests to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System related to gun sales.⁹ In response to this concerning spike, then-Governor Gina Raimondo signed an executive order extending the timeframe that law enforcement have to perform a background check on potential gun-buyers from 7 days to 30 days.¹⁰ At the same time gun sales were surging across the U.S., many domestic violence victims were stuck inside their homes with dangerous abusers due to pandemic-related safety concerns and orders.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- An average of 57 women are shot and killed by an intimate partner every month in the U.S.¹¹
- Black women are twice as likely as non-Hispanic white women to be fatally shot by an intimate partner.¹²
- In at least 53% of the mass shootings that took place in the U.S. between 2009 and 2020, the perpetrator shot a current or former intimate partner or family member.¹³

GUN SAFETY LAWS IN RHODE ISLAND

- In 2017, R.I. took an important step toward disarming dangerous abusers with the passage of the *Protect RI Families Act*. This law requires anyone convicted of domestic violence misdemeanor crimes or subject to a restraining order to surrender their firearms.¹⁴
- In 2018, on National Gun Violence Awareness Day, then-Gov. Gina Raimondo signed two important gun safety bills. The *Red Flag Law* allows law enforcement to petition the R.I. Superior Court for an “extreme risk protection order” to disarm an individual when there is sufficient evidence they pose an imminent risk of harm to themselves or others. Raimondo also signed a law banning bump stocks and other rapid-fire gun modifications.¹⁵
- In 2020, then-Gov. Raimondo signed the *Julie Lynn Cardinal Act* into law, which requires gun sellers to send firearm applications to the police department in the buyer’s hometown.¹⁶ Prior to the bill’s passage, gun sellers were only required to forward applications to the police department in the city where the gun store is located. The bill’s namesake, Julie Lynn Cardinal, was fatally shot in 2019 by a man who purchased a gun in a town neighboring his hometown of Westerly, R.I. Although he had previous contact with police in Westerly that likely would have prevented him from purchasing the firearm, his application was forwarded to the gun seller’s local police department, where officials were not aware of his history. This shooter also had a prior history of domestic violence.
- In 2020, R.I. became the fifth state in the U.S. to regulate undetectable and untraceable firearms, known as “ghost guns.” The law prohibits the manufacturing, selling, transferring, purchasing, or possession of these deadly weapons.¹⁷ The term “ghost gun” refers to firearms that lack a serial number and are, therefore, untraceable by law enforcement. This includes 3D printed guns and DIY gun kits assembled at home. “Ghost guns” can be accessed without a background check by anyone, including individuals who are prohibited from possessing firearms.

Homicide Incidents

HOMICIDE INCIDENTS – 2016

SHERRY PRICE MANN, 48

January 9, 2016 – Central Falls

On January 9, 2016, Sherry Price Mann was violently assaulted by her boyfriend, Percy Abbott, at their home in Central Falls. Sherry was hospitalized following the assault and passed away in the hospital a few weeks later. Abbott pleaded *nolo contendere* to manslaughter and is currently serving 10 years of a 30-year prison sentence. Sherry was a mother, grandmother and sister, and is survived by three children and seven grandchildren. She attended Central High School in Providence and worked at The Salvation Army. According to media reports, Sherry's family will remember her "funny sense of humor," "loud laughter" and "carefree spirit and the excitement and energy she brought to family gatherings."

MARIA CECILIA VELASQUEZ PALACIO, 50

February 11, 2016 – Pawtucket

On February 11, 2016, Maria Cecilia Velasquez Palacio was fatally stabbed by her husband, Ariel Alonzo Montoya, at their Pawtucket home. Montoya also fatally stabbed their pet bulldog, Bella, and then himself. About a week before the murder, Maria reported to police that Montoya had been threatening and abusive toward her. Maria moved from Colombia in South America to Pawtucket, R.I., about a year before her death and was employed as an assembly worker. She was a mother and grandmother, and is survived by two children and one grandchild.

MICHAEL ROGERS, 19

March 26, 2016 – Warwick

On March 26, 2016, Michael Rogers and his father, David Rogers, were attacked in their Warwick home as they slept by David's brother Jared Rogers and four coconspirators. Michael died from the attack, and David sustained knife injuries to the abdomen and upper chest but awoke during the attack and survived the incident. Jared Rogers is currently serving a life sentence after pleading *nolo contendere* to murder in the second degree, assault with intent to commit murder and two counts of conspiracy. The four other men Jared Rogers recruited to assist in the attack have also been charged with crimes related to this incident. Michael Rogers was a father and brother, survived by his daughter and his 11 siblings. He was a 2015 graduate of Central High School in Providence and

according to media reports, "enjoyed playing basketball, playing video games and shopping with his mom."

MANUEL LAUREANNO, 69

May 16, 2016 – Portsmouth

On May 16, 2016, Manuel Laureanno was fatally shot in the chest by his wife, Lisa Almeida-Laureanno. Shortly after the incident, Almeida-Laureanno called 911 and admitted to killing her husband in their Portsmouth home. Almeida-Laureanno pleaded guilty to manslaughter and is serving 20 years of a 30-year prison sentence. Manuel was a brother, uncle, father and grandfather, and is survived by a daughter, grandchild and many nieces and nephews. Manuel served in the United States Air Force from 1964 to 1968. According to media reports, his hobbies included flying twin engine airplanes, repairing antique cars, scuba diving, fishing, hunting and being with his family and friends.

CESAR ALONZO, 38

July 3, 2016 – Providence

In the early morning hours of July 3, 2016, Cesar Alonzo and Karla Estrada were confronted by Axel Morales, Karla's ex-boyfriend, outside their home in Providence. During the altercation, Morales backed his car into the couple, running over Cesar multiple times. Karla was injured but survived the attack. Cesar was pronounced dead at the hospital. While being held without bail for charges related to this incident, Morales violated a no contact order with Karla and received an additional misdemeanor charge. Morales pleaded guilty to manslaughter, domestic assault with a dangerous weapon and violation of a no contact order and is currently serving 25 years of a 40-year prison sentence. Cesar and Karla were recently married at the time of the murder. In addition to his wife, Cesar is survived by his two children, parents, four siblings and grandmother.

ANDRES ARGUIJO-ACOSTA, 34

July 30, 2016 – Providence

During the early morning hours of July 30, 2016, Marta Santos and her boyfriend, Andres Arguijo-Acosta, were at her Providence home when Fredi Lopez, Marta's ex-boyfriend, broke in. When Andres confronted him, Lopez stabbed Andres in the chest with a large kitchen knife. Andres was later pronounced dead at Rhode Island

Hospital. Lopez was located at his home later that day and was charged with murder in the first degree, breaking and entering and felony assault. He pleaded *nolo contendere* to murder in the second degree and is currently serving a life sentence. According to media reports, people who knew Andres described him as a nice person. Andres worked in the jewelry business and was the father of three children.

MARYJO OSGOOD, 55

July 30, 2016 – Providence

Sometime between July 29 and July 30, 2016, MaryJo Osgood was shot to death by her husband, Franklin Osgood, in the garage of their Providence home. After fleeing across several states, Osgood, a former Providence Police Department officer, refused to pull his car over for police, crashed into a barrier and then fatally shot himself. MaryJo was a mother, sister and grandmother, and is survived by four children and two grandchildren. The youngest of eight siblings, MaryJo was described in media reports as “bright, energetic and spunky.”

HOMICIDE INCIDENTS – 2017

EUDORA GUSTAFSON, 66

February 10, 2017 – Bristol

On February 10, 2017, Eudora Gustafson was killed by her grandson, Raymond Paiva, and his girlfriend, Selena Martinez, at her home in Bristol. After strangling and suffocating Eudora, Paiva and Martinez stole her jewelry, checkbook and car. Eudora’s body was found at home by her husband, Mark Gustafson. Paiva and Martinez were located in Providence and indicted on multiple charges related to Eudora’s murder and the theft of her property. Eudora was a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Described in media reports as a “caring soul,” she volunteered on the Bristol Rescue Squad as one of the first female EMTs in the town and worked as a certified nursing assistant at several nursing homes in the Bristol and Warren area.

JENNIFER SILVA, 41

May 20, 2017 – East Providence

In the early morning hours of May 20, 2017, Jennifer Silva was found unresponsive and severely injured in the driveway of the East Providence home she shared with her

HOMICIDE RISK FACTOR

The Victim Has Recently Left or Ended the Relationship

The time after a victim ends an abusive relationship can be one of the most dangerous periods. Perpetrators of domestic violence will often escalate their tactics of abuse as they start to lose control over the victim. The risk of intimate partner homicide against women increases significantly when they separate from their abusive partner after having lived together. This is true regardless of whether the victim leaves the home or asks the abusive partner to leave. The risk tends to be highest shortly after separation, and decreases over time. Even in situations where the victim has not ended the relationship but the abuser believes they may do so, the abuser is likely to escalate their violence in response. An increase in the severity or frequency of abuse are both independent risk factors for intimate partner homicide, regardless of the status of the relationship.¹⁸

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- A study looking at intimate partner homicides in 11 U.S. cities between 1994 and 2000 found that a woman’s risk of being killed by her partner increased significantly if the couple separated after having lived together. This study found the risk of homicide may increase or decrease when certain sociodemographic factors and relationship dynamics are taken into account, such as the abuser’s employment status and education level, the presence of children and the level of control in the relationship – for example, if the couple separated after having lived together and the abuser exhibited highly controlling behaviors, the woman’s risk of homicide increased by nine times.¹⁹
- Victims who end an abusive relationship to be with another partner are also at an increased risk for domestic violence homicide. The same 11-city study found that when the most violent incident of abuse occurred after the victim ended the relationship to be with another partner, their risk of homicide increased by five times.²⁰

Homicide Incidents

boyfriend, Allen Hanson. Hanson reported to police that Jennifer was the victim of a hit and run. Evidence at the scene was inconsistent with her being hit by a car, and an investigation revealed her injuries were caused by Hanson. Jennifer was taken to the hospital and died from her injuries. Hanson was charged with domestic murder in the first degree. Hanson pled *nolo contendere* to manslaughter and was sentenced to serve 26 years of a 30-year prison sentence. Jennifer was a mother and aunt, and was described in media reports as a valued member of the East Providence community who was very passionate about her job, family and pets.

JUSTINE CAVACO, 29

August 26, 2017 – Providence

On the evening of August 26, 2017, Justine Cavaco was found slipping in and out of consciousness after being assaulted in a restaurant parking lot in Providence. She was rushed to the hospital, where she died from her injuries shortly after arriving. A witness reported to police on scene that Justine's ex-boyfriend, Christian Boucher,

was seen assaulting her. At the time of the murder, a no contact order was in place to restrain Boucher from having any contact with Justine. Boucher was charged with domestic murder in the second degree. He later died by suicide while being held at the Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI). Justine was a mother, sister, daughter and granddaughter, survived by her parents, brother and son. In the condolences friends shared on her obituary, Justine was described as "a vibrant soul" who was "truly a good person and friend."

MANIRIHO NKinAMUBANZI, 44

November 10, 2017 – Providence

On November 10, 2017, Maniriho Nkinamubanzi's oldest daughter called police to report her mother missing only to later discover her mother's dead body concealed in a closet in her Providence home. Police arrested Maniriho's estranged husband, Bosco Tukamuhabwa, and charged him with domestic murder in the first degree and domestic violation of a no contact order. According to reports, Maniriho fled her home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a refugee and had resettled along with her family in Providence in 2015, where she worked as a laborer in the food retail industry. According to the words of a friend on her memorial page, Maniriho was "full of strength and always smiling." She is survived by her four children.

HOMICIDE INCIDENTS – 2018

Jeremy Lehmann, 50

January 27, 2018 – Westerly

On Saturday, January 27, 2018, Jeremy Lehmann was fatally stabbed by Nelson Dearce at the Westerly home Dearce shared with his ex-girlfriend and their four children. Jeremy was at the home visiting Dearce's ex-girlfriend when Dearce returned home and attacked Jeremy, stabbing him over 50 times, while his ex-girlfriend and four children remained in another room. After murdering Jeremy, Dearce told his ex-girlfriend, "I killed him, I should have killed you." Dearce is currently serving a life sentence after pleading *nolo contendere* to murder in the second degree and domestic violence assault with a dangerous weapon in a dwelling. Jeremy was a father to two daughters and is survived by many more immediate and extended family members. He was a U.S. Navy veteran, serving from 1986 to 2007, and spent time as an instructor at the SUNY Maritime Academy in Bronx, New York.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Gender, Age and Racial Disparities in Domestic Violence Homicides in R.I.

A separate analysis of domestic violence homicides that took place in R.I. between 2004 and 2015, conducted by the R.I. Department of Health's Violent Death Reporting System, highlights some of the age, gender and racial disparities that exist in these cases. Victims tracked during this period ranged in age from 18 to 93 years old, with nearly half of them falling between the ages of 25 and 44. The majority (70%) of the victims were women. Fifty-eight percent of the victims were non-Hispanic white, 15.9% were non-Hispanic Black and 22.7% were Hispanic. According to population data based on the 2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Black residents account for 4.7% of the R.I. adult population, and those of Hispanic ethnicity represent 12.1% of the state adult population.²¹ These findings indicate Black and Latinx Rhode Islanders experience domestic violence homicide at disproportionately high rates when compared to the overall population data for these communities.

VICKY SONEVONG, 24

March 1, 2018 – Providence

On March 1, 2018, Vicky Sonevong was fatally shot by her former boyfriend, Steve Soundara, in her Providence apartment. After shooting Vicky, Soundara fatally shot himself. Their two young children were in the home at the time of the murder and overheard the incident. When Vicky's mother arrived a short time later, her 4-year-old grandson told her he heard gunshots and his mother had died. Vicky's mother reported Soundara had a history of abusing and regularly threatening to kill her daughter.

Vicky was a young mother of two young children. Media reports described Vicky as a “good person” and “hard worker,” who “loved her children with all of her heart.”

DONNA DUTTON, 54

April 7, 2018 – Warwick

Sometime between April 6 and April 7, 2018, Donna Dutton was fatally shot by Joseph Schlink, who had been her roommate for about two months. After shooting Donna in the kitchen of the Warwick home, Schlink retreated to the living room where he fatally shot himself.

HOMICIDE RISK FACTOR

The Perpetrator Has Stalked the Victim

Stalking is a prevalent tactic used by perpetrators of domestic violence and is a serious risk factor for intimate partner homicide and attempted homicide. Stalking can encompass a range of behaviors which perpetrators of domestic violence use to control, intimidate, isolate and instill fear in victims. Abusers may send unwanted gifts, drive by the victim's home and/or show up unexpectedly at locations the victim frequents. Stalkers are increasingly using technology against victims, which can create a sense that the perpetrator is ever-present, even in situations where the victim has physically separated from them.²² Using technology to stalk — also known as cyberstalking — can involve text messages, phone calls, email, messaging apps, social media and monitoring a victim's location using a GPS device or mobile app, among other tactics. In 2016, then-Governor Gina Raimondo signed a bill making it a crime in R.I. for civilians to electronically track a motor vehicle without the vehicle owner's consent. Cyberstalking is also used to control and humiliate victims. One common example of this tactic is known as “revenge porn,” or the sharing of sexually explicit videos and images of a person without their consent. Perpetrators may use the threat of sharing such images on social media and/or with the victim's family, friends, or coworkers as a means to further exert their control. In 2018, R.I. passed a law prohibiting “revenge porn” and creating a felony offense for anyone who uses the threat of posting such videos or images to extort the victim.

Stalking often goes unidentified and can be difficult to charge and prosecute. Unlike other domestic violence cases that can be defined by a single incident, stalking cases must include a pattern of behaviors. Oftentimes, these individual behaviors are not illegal, but collectively, they can constitute stalking. Additional

difficulties in establishing stalking cases include jurisdictional issues when the perpetrator's stalking behaviors span multiple law enforcement jurisdictions, the inability to use crimes for which the perpetrator has already been charged and convicted to build a stalking case and vagueness in the stalking statutes. Although stalking is a felony in R.I., the length of time it can take to build a stalking case, coupled with the need to address the victim's immediate safety concerns, can lead to cases that involve stalking behaviors being charged as misdemeanor crimes, such as violation of a protective order. Misconceptions about the realities of stalking, such as the myth that stalking is most often committed by a stranger, can also lead to underreporting and undercharging. Abusers may avoid accountability by claiming their behaviors were for a legitimate purpose, such as visiting their children or trying to work out relationship issues.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- A total of 76% of women who were murdered by an intimate partner were stalked prior to the murder, and 85% of women who survived murder attempts by their intimate partner were stalked.²³
- A total of 89% of female homicide victims who had been physically assaulted before their murder were also stalked in the year prior to their murder.²⁴
- Stalking intersects with other risk factors for intimate partner homicide. In a 2018 survey of victim calls to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, over three quarters of callers who had been threatened by their partner with a gun also reported being stalked by their partner.²⁵

Homicide Incidents

Donna was the mother of a son and sister to six siblings. According to media reports, she was a “happy person” who “enjoyed going to church, knitting and crocheting.”

MICHELLE BENVENUTI, 45

October 1, 2018 – Woonsocket

On October 1, 2018, Michelle Benvenuti was fatally shot by her ex-husband, Glenn Benvenuti, at his Woonsocket home. After killing Michelle, Glenn Benvenuti fatally shot himself. Their 7-year-old son was home at the time of the incident and overheard the shooting. Michelle was a mother, wife, sister and valued member of her community who worked at a community health center, according to reports. She is survived by her son, parents and four siblings.

HOMICIDE RISK FACTOR

The Perpetrator Has Threatened to Kill the Victim

When an abuser makes threats to kill a victim of domestic violence or threatens them with a weapon, their risk of homicide is substantially higher. Research has shown that one of the best predictors of future violence is the victim's belief that the perpetrator will kill them.²⁶ It is critically important to listen to and believe victims when they say they think the perpetrator is capable of killing them. Those experiencing domestic violence know better than anyone about the dynamics of their specific situation and what will keep them safe.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- Abused women whose partner threatened to kill them are 15 times more likely to be killed by their partner than abused women whose partner did not make such threats.²⁷
- Women who were threatened or assaulted with a gun are 20 times more likely to be killed by their abusive partner.²⁸

HOMICIDE INCIDENTS – 2019

RACHAEL RENE, 34

January 15, 2019 – Providence

On January 15, 2019, Rachael Rene was brutally stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend, Luis Matta, in her Providence home. Their 8-month-old son was home during the murder and witnessed this homicide. After killing Rachael, Matta dropped off his son at his parents' home and then went to the Providence Public Safety Complex, where he confessed to the murder. According to media reports, Matta was jealous, physically abusive and exhibited stalking behaviors, and the abuse worsened after Rachael became pregnant. Prior to her death, Rachael told Warren police and the R.I. Family Court that Matta was violent and had threatened to kill her, and she worried about the traumatic effects of this behavior on their baby. The day before the murder, a R.I. Family Court judge granted Rachael sole custody of their son. At the time of the murder, Matta was on bail for a previous domestic violence incident, where he had broken down a door and entered Rachael's apartment. After this previous incident, a no contact order was issued, barring Matta from having any contact with Rachael. Matta was charged with domestic murder in the first degree and domestic violation of a no contact order, and he was considered a bail violator due to his previous charge. Rachael was described in media reports as a “sweet soul” and “wonderful person” who “got along with everyone.” She was a daughter, granddaughter, sibling, aunt and mother to her infant son. Prior to the birth of her child, Rachael worked as a hairdresser at several salons and was very passionate about styling hair, according to reports.

LAUREN ISE, 29

March 13, 2019 – Cranston

On March 13, 2019, Lauren Ise was strangled to death by her ex-boyfriend, Michael Marrapese, at her home in Cranston. Less than two days before the murder, Marrapese showed up at Lauren's home, banging on her windows and threatening to kill her. Although she reported this incident to police, Marrapese was not charged with any crimes. Lauren reported she felt threatened by Marrapese and expressed wanting to apply for a restraining order. Marrapese had a long criminal history and, at the time of the murder, was on probation for a charge of disorderly conduct related to a February

incident with Lauren. During that same February incident, Michael Marrapese's younger brother, Steven Marrapese, was charged with assaulting Lauren with a knife. Michael Marrapese was arraigned on charges of domestic first-degree murder and has been held without bail at the ACI since his arrest. Born in Woonsocket, Lauren was a daughter, sibling and niece to many uncles and aunts. She adored her dog and loved her many friends, according to reports, and her family recalled her "extremely big heart," "loving nature" and "kindness."

CLARK MURRAY SR., 70

March 19, 2019 – North Providence

On March 19, 2019, Clark Murray Sr. was fatally stabbed by his adult son, Clark Murray Jr., at their North Providence home. Murray Jr. then stabbed himself in an unsuccessful attempt to take his own life. Police were called to the home for another domestic violence incident earlier that year. Clark Murray Jr. is charged with domestic murder in the first degree. Clark Murray Sr. was originally from Chicago, Illinois, and worked on a hospital liaison committee to help community members in need. He was the fourth of six children and was a father of three. He lived in his home in North Providence with his wife for many years.

BERTA BOGRAN, 48

August 24, 2019 – Providence

On the afternoon of August 24, 2019, Berta Bogran was fatally shot on the street outside her Providence home by her estranged husband, Oscar Hudson. Hudson then fled to his nearby apartment, where he shot and killed himself. After Berta filed for divorce from Hudson in 2018, he installed a tracker on her car and moved only four houses away from her residence. Just two months later, Berta filed for a restraining order in R.I. Family Court, stating Hudson was stalking her and "is very manipulative and his anger is escalating." Hudson violated the restraining order two months later when he showed up at Berta's residence. A Providence police officer who responded to this incident reported that Berta stated Hudson was threatening her and "he's going to end up killing me."* Hudson was found guilty by the R.I. District Court of criminal violation of a restraining order. He received a sentence of a one-year filing, domestic abuse counseling and an

additional criminal domestic no contact order. Berta was a mother and a grandmother. According to media reports, she emigrated from Honduras in 2001 and settled in Providence where she worked as a nanny while caring for her three children and her mother. One of Berta's sons described her as "a great mom" and "the hardest worker I ever met."

*The Protect Rhode Island Families Act, a law that passed in 2017, prohibits domestic abusers convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes or subject to an order of protection from possessing firearms. Despite this law, and although Berta specifically checked a box on her affidavit asking the court to order Hudson to surrender any firearms in his possession, firearm surrender did not take place during proceedings for the restraining order filed by Berta or during the subsequent hearings for violating the order.²⁹

HOMICIDE INCIDENTS – 2020

CHERYL SMITH, 54

January 1, 2020 – Pawtucket

On the evening of January 1, 2020, Cheryl Smith was shot and killed by Jack Doherty at her Pawtucket home. Doherty is the fiancé of Shaylyn Moran, an ex-girlfriend of Cheryl's son, Leonard Troufield III. After answering a knock at her front door, Cheryl was shot multiple times in the chest by Doherty. According to news reports detailing Facebook posts, Moran and Doherty had recently met online and planned to meet up in R.I. The couple got engaged nearly 24 hours before the murder. Police believe Troufield III was the intended target of the attack due to his past relationship with Moran. In October 2019, Troufield III was charged with domestic simple assault and battery and disorderly conduct, and a no contact order was issued. Troufield III reported Moran had previously threatened to kill him and made threats against his brother, mother and dog. Moran and Doherty were both charged with multiple offenses, including first-degree murder, discharge of a firearm when committing a crime of violence with death resulting, conspiracy and carrying a pistol without a license or permit. Moran was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty to the murder of Cheryl Smith. Doherty's charges are still pending. Cheryl was a daughter, granddaughter, niece, sibling and mother of two. She worked at the local YMCA as part of the childcare team and was a beloved member of her community who had many friends, according to reports.

Homicide Incidents

HOMICIDE RISK FACTOR

The Perpetrator Has Strangled the Victim

Strangulation is one of the most serious and lethal forms of domestic abuse. Despite its severity and prevalence, strangulation is often underreported. Victims of strangulation can become unconscious within seconds of the onset of the assault, and death can occur within minutes. By impeding the victim's breathing and circulation, the perpetrator becomes the embodiment of the power and control dynamic at the core of domestic violence. Even when there are no observable injuries immediately after an assault by strangulation, victims can experience severe internal injuries, and death can occur after a period of days or weeks.³⁰ Prior assaults by strangulation are a strong predictor of future lethal violence. Additionally, recent research suggests the most severe physical and mental health outcomes associated with strangulation are related to the amount of times a victim has been strangled and the severity of the assault in terms of the victim's loss of consciousness.³¹ In 2019, a sub-question was added to the Danger Assessment tool created by Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell regarding multiple strangulation incidents and whether the victim lost consciousness during those incidents. Studies suggest by taking these factors into account, the updated Danger Assessment is significantly better at predicting future incidents of near-fatal violence than the original Danger Assessment tool.³² It is important to note, however, that in R.I., evidence of loss of consciousness is not necessary to prove the felony crime of domestic violence strangulation.³³

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- A national study of women living in urban environments showed women who have experienced prior incidents of nonfatal strangulation by an intimate partner are more than six times as likely to become the victim of an attempted homicide and more than seven times as likely to be killed by their partner when compared to women who do not have a history of being strangled.³⁴
- Research suggests strangulation is a gendered act of violence. One national report looking at intimate partner and sexual abuse in the U.S. found that women are strangled by their intimate partner at a rate about 13 times higher than men.³⁵

VINCENT SEBASTIAN III, 28

January 25, 2020 – Westerly

On January 25, 2020, Vincent Sebastian III was at his girlfriend's apartment in Westerly when his cousin, Louis Seignious Jr., shot and killed him. After a verbal dispute, Seignious shot Vincent as he was attempting to block Seignious from entering the home. Vincent's girlfriend, who shared a child in common with Seignious, reported he had made threats toward her and Vincent prior to the murder. After fleeing the scene, Seignious remained on the run for a week. He was arrested on February 1 in Groton, CT, after a bystander recognized him from news reports. Seignious faces charges of domestic murder in the first degree, carrying a weapon while committing a crime of violence and domestic breaking and entering. Known to family and friends as "Vinny," Vincent was a father to one son and is survived by his parents, siblings and extended family members. According to information provided by his family, Vincent loved basketball, swimming, music and spending time having fun with his family and friends.

KRISTINE OHLER, 30

February 17, 2020 – Pawtucket

On February 17, 2020, Kristine Ohler was strangled to death by Victor Colebut in Pawtucket. Kristine and Colebut had a child together. Colebut had a history of domestic violence and was out on bail for previous domestic violence charges at the time of the murder. On July 8, 2020, he was indicted by a grand jury on charges of domestic murder in the first degree, domestic simple assault and battery (third offense) and domestic violation of a no contact order (third offense). In comments on Kristine's memorial page, loved ones described her as a "wonderful" and "amazing" person who will be missed.

TANYA GAGNON, 44

June 17, 2020 – Woonsocket

On June 17, 2020, police arrived at a multi-unit apartment building in Woonsocket to do a wellness check on two people. After entering the home on Social Street, they discovered the bodies of Tanya Gagnon and Charles Johnson, who had been in a relationship for about three years and lived in the apartment together since March. According to police, after shooting Tanya, Johnson moved to another room in the home where he fatally shot himself. A cat was also found shot to death at the scene, and a dog was found alive and unharmed. Johnson had a

previous criminal record that included domestic abuse and other crimes. Born in Woonsocket, Tanya was a daughter, granddaughter, sibling, godmother and aunt. According to media reports, she was “independent and smart.” She had a career as a case worker for 27 years and loved her animals, reggae music and spending time with friends and family.

DEREK DESJARDIN, 30

June 26, 2020 – Woonsocket

On June 26, 2020, police found Derek Desjardin dead from multiple gunshot wounds in his Woonsocket home. Paul Raposo was arrested later that day at a park in possession of a loaded 9mm pistol. The two men had been roommates for about a year. Raposo is charged with murder in the first degree, discharge of a firearm when committing a crime of violence, carrying a firearm without a license, intent to conceal a crime and firing in a compact area. Derek was a father, son and grandson. According to his family, Derek was a “champion bowler, expert landscaper, proud resident of Woonsocket and good friend to many.”

ERIKA BELCOURT, 40

August 22, 2020 – Woonsocket

On August 22, 2020, police arrived at the Walnut Hill Apartments in Woonsocket to find Erika Belcourt lying in the parking lot with serious injuries. Although she was conscious when first responders arrived on scene, Erika later died of her injuries at Rhode Island Hospital. According to police, in the midst of a heated argument, Erika’s boyfriend, James Grilli, intentionally accelerated his car toward her, knocking her down and running her over. Grilli is charged with domestic first-degree murder, domestic assault with a deadly weapon and domestic breaking and entering. Grilli is also considered a bail violator for a previous case involving another woman and a child. Erika was an aunt, sister and mother of two boys. According to a fundraiser set up by Erika’s family, she was “a hard-working nurse who had a passion to care for many patients in her years in the medical field.”

PAUL ZOIS, 41

December 29, 2020 – Cranston

On December 29, 2020, Charles Gangi shot and killed his girlfriend’s son, Paul Zois. According to police, Gangi was arguing with Paul inside the Cranston home they

shared with Paul’s mother and aunt when Gangi shot Paul in the chest. Paul was rushed to Rhode Island Hospital, where he died from his injuries. Investigators collected two handguns from the home while executing a search warrant, including the firearm believed to be the murder weapon. Gangi pleaded *nolo contendere* to one count of second-degree murder and was sentenced to serve 30 years in prison, with an additional 30 years of probation. Paul was a son and nephew and worked as a loan officer. He was born in Providence and resided in Cranston.

Out-of-State Homicide

The victim in the following homicide is a Rhode Islander who was killed in a domestic violence incident in another state. This case is not included in the total count of homicides in this report but is documented here in recognition of the impact of this loss of life on our community.

BRANDI BERG, 37

June 22, 2019 – North Attleboro, Massachusetts

On June 22, 2019, Brandi Berg was in the parking lot of a shopping plaza in North Attleboro, Mass., when her former coworker, Steven Fregeolle, who had followed her to the plaza, fatally shot her through the windshield of her vehicle. Moments before the shooting, Brandi texted her boyfriend that Fregeolle was harassing her. Brandi had previously told family she did not feel safe around Fregeolle, describing him as a stalker. Leading up to the murder, Fregeolle had displayed obsessive behavior toward Brandi, including contacting her family and friends and sending frequent messages. Immediately after the shooting, Fregeolle drove to a wildlife sanctuary in Charlestown, R.I., where he shot and killed himself. Media reports indicated there may have been a prior dating relationship between the parties, however, the nature of the relationship clearly consisted of unwanted advances and dangerous stalking behavior. Brandi was the eldest of four siblings, a mother of a teenage daughter and a lifelong resident of Riverside, R.I. Media reports described her as “a kind-hearted person who was always willing to help others.” She enjoyed running marathons and boating with her family.

Homicide Incidents

The Impact on Children Who Witness Domestic Violence

Children who witness domestic violence can experience negative physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive and behavioral outcomes. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study looked at the relationship between certain adverse experiences in childhood, such as growing up in a violent home, and certain health-risk behaviors and diseases in adulthood. The study found a connection between the number of adverse experiences a child had and their risks for developing certain behavioral and health conditions later in life, such as cancer, chronic lung disease, liver disease, skeletal fractures, heart disease, depression, substance use disorder, suicide attempts and sexually transmitted infections, among others.³⁶ Children's immediate reactions to witnessing domestic violence can include generalized anxiety, sleeplessness, nightmares, difficulty concentrating, high activity levels, increased aggression, increased anxiety about being separated from a parent and intense worry about their safety or their parent's safety.³⁷

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- Women who have children who are not biologically related to their abusive partner are at an increased risk for intimate partner homicide.³⁸ One study that examined this risk factor found the victim's chance of being killed by their partner more than doubled.³⁹
- Many children who have lost their mother to intimate partner homicide do not receive adequate counseling interventions after the incident. One study found that nearly 25% of the children in the study did not receive counseling after their mother was murdered by their father or father figure. Further, nearly 20% of children who actually witnessed the homicide or found their mother's body received no counseling.⁴⁰
- Children who witness intimate partner violence growing up are more likely to become involved in abusive relationships in the future, either as a victim or perpetrator of abuse.⁴¹

RHODE ISLAND LEGISLATION ADDRESSING CHILDREN WHO WITNESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- In 2017, R.I. passed a bill that expands the Rhode Island Crime Victim Compensation Program, which now covers the cost of mental health counseling for minors who witness homicides or domestic violence.
- In 2019, R.I. passed a law allowing survivors to include their minor children in a R.I. Family Court restraining order, regardless of whether or not the children are related to the abuser. This law decreases the barriers survivors face when trying to protect themselves and their children. Additionally, perpetrators can be arrested and charged with a misdemeanor crime for violating the terms of such a Family Court restraining order.

COLLECTION OF DATA

Unlike some states, Rhode Island has no central database or separate reporting requirements for domestic violence homicides. The RICADV collects publicly available information on domestic violence homicides, primarily from media reports as well as public court and R.I. Department of Corrections databases. Our confidentiality policies bar us from sharing any information gathered in the course of a client accessing domestic violence services from the RICADV or its member agencies. The data included in this report is based on information available at the time of publication and is subject to change (for updates, visit www.ricadv.org).

DEFINING “DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE”

Rhode Island’s Domestic Violence Prevention Act (R.I. Gen. Laws § 12-29) defines domestic violence as any crime that occurs between people who are in one or more of the following relationships:

- Current or former spouses;
- Persons of any age with a child in common;
- Persons of any age who have been in a substantive dating relationship within the past year;
- Adults related by blood or marriage; and/or
- Adults who have lived together within the last three years.

The RICADV’s homicide report project collects information on any homicides that fall under the above legal definitions, as well as those involving former intimate partners whose relationship ended more than one year before the homicide. In addition, the RICADV collects information on other cases where domestic violence leads to loss of life in Rhode Island communities. Examples of other categories can include:

- Cases in which bystanders, including emergency responders, are killed during a domestic violence incident;
- Cases where children are killed by an abuser as a tactic to control or punish their primary victim of domestic violence; and
- Cases where abusers target and murder subsequent intimate partners of their primary victim.

EXCLUSIONS

We have excluded the following from the analysis of this report:

- Cases where a court or grand jury determined the killing was justified in self-defense, and there is a lack of other evidence suggesting the perpetrator had a history of violent and controlling behavior toward the victim or toward other intimate partners or family members;
- Cases of family member homicides where a court ruled the perpetrator was not guilty by reason of insanity, and there is a lack of evidence of domestic violence in the perpetrator’s history; and
- Cases of attempted domestic violence murder in which the perpetrator subsequently committed suicide and the suicide was the only loss of life in the incident.

Limitations

Domestic violence is a complex dynamic that affects the lives of the people involved in ways that can be beyond the ability of numbers or short descriptions to express. This report cannot attempt to offer a full understanding of the lives that were lost or what these individuals meant to their families, friends and communities.

Because this report is based on media and public information systems the RICADV does not maintain, it is possible we have unintentionally incorporated misinformation, despite dedicated efforts to fact-check the included information. In the case of incidents with ongoing investigations, court cases, or appeals, there may be additional or contradicting information made public after the publication of this report. We will publish any necessary corrections and clarifications in future reports.

While the media and criminal legal system have improved greatly at recognizing and identifying domestic violence homicides in the past four decades since the RICADV began collecting this information, it is likely there are domestic violence homicides that have occurred without being identified as domestic violence. Certain categories of domestic violence homicides may be particularly undercounted, including:

- **Children killed by domestic violence abusers.** Murders of children by their caregivers are often viewed and categorized solely as child abuse, however, there is a significant overlap of domestic violence and child abuse as many abusers use hurting their victim's children as a means to exert power and control over the victim. In some of these cases, there may be a context of domestic violence that goes unmentioned in the media.
- **Intimate partner homicide in same-sex relationships.** The presence of a relationship in same-sex intimate partner homicides has not been consistently reported. As societal stigma around same-sex relationships lessens, it is likely that media, law enforcement and court systems will report these cases more accurately as intimate partner violence rather than as having occurred between "acquaintances" or "roommates."

- **Measuring and reporting on gender-based violence.** We acknowledge this report's data tables and related context present gender variables framed in the gender binary (male/female) only, and gender is more complex than the binary construct. We recognize LGBTQIA+ and gender non-conforming people experience domestic abuse and interrelated forms of violence at disproportionately high rates⁴² and affirm it is essential to our work to end violence that gender-based data be accurately, inclusively collected and represented. We continue to work within the RICADV, within systems and with partners on the local and national levels to advocate for data systems and approaches that accurately represent gender and gender-based violence.

Finally, while the subject of racial disparities in the criminal legal system is an issue of utmost national and local importance, due to difficulties of collecting and presenting complete and accurate information on the topic from available sources, we have not included information on this topic in this report. For example, it is not uncommon for different records to report different races for the same person. Such discrepancies can arise from incorrect assumptions by a third party filling out a form or reporting on the incident, or from differences in how various records create and define racial categories. Doing a full investigation into the racial identity of every victim and perpetrator was beyond the scope of this report. Due to the relatively small number of homicide incidents, there was a risk that any accidental misinformation could skew results dramatically enough for false conclusions to potentially be reached, so for that reason, we chose to omit the data.

HOMICIDE PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RHODE ISLAND

Enhance screening for dangerousness and lethality risk factors to include all domestic violence criminal and restraining order cases to identify high-risk cases. It is vital that judges, magistrates, law enforcement officials and other decision makers have a comprehensive understanding of danger and lethality risks when asked to make determinations about bail and level of supervision during probation. Another way to reduce domestic violence homicides and severe domestic abuse crimes in R.I. includes the establishment of a dedicated **High-Risk Domestic Violence Court** (“DV Court”) within the R.I. District Court to promote greater victim safety, informed judicial decision making and offender accountability in critical misdemeanor domestic abuse cases. Many other states and jurisdictions across the country have embraced this specialized court model. This should include ongoing training for the presiding domestic violence court judge(s), their support staff, resource coordinator and other district and family court officials and community partners, including continued training in the use of the evidence-based pretrial dangerousness and recidivism assessment screening instrument in accordance with the *Rhode Island Justice Reinvestment Act*, passed in 2017.

Fully enforce laws that bar perpetrators and those subject to domestic violence restraining orders from possessing or obtaining firearms. The presence of a gun can be the determining factor in whether or not a perpetrator’s attack becomes deadly and also increases the possibility that bystanders or family members will also be killed in an attack. Although the *Protect Rhode Island Families Act* was passed in 2017 to disarm abusers, all systems including the courts, law enforcement and gun dealers must do more to ensure domestic violence defendants surrender their firearms and to enforce gun surrender as early as possible in the proceedings to prevent homicide. This should include court officials monitoring case files, conducting compliance review hearings and enforcing court orders with appropriate remedies. **R.I. courts should utilize specialized checklists and bench cards that prompt judges to inquire about the presence, location and surrender-status of firearms** in all domestic violence cases to prevent gun-related homicides.

Explore non-carceral forms of safety and justice, including restorative and transformative justice approaches. Many survivors are looking for alternative ways to respond to

and prevent family violence outside of the traditional legal system. Gender-based violence and state violence are interconnected, and it is important our communities engage in conversations about what actually keeps survivors safe and able to heal and thrive, and what approaches or interventions will end violence and address its root causes, rather than perpetuate violence in different forms. Acknowledging the limitations, harms and systemic racism of the incarceration system is particularly important as local and national activists and advocates organizing in the Black Lives Matter movement imagine and develop new solutions and live into anti-racist transformational approaches to address violence. Created for and by communities most impacted by systemic oppressions, transformative justice seeks to respond to violence and abuse without creating even more violence and harm. Ultimately, a world truly free from all forms of violence will be free from systems of oppression and the inequities of justice we witness today.

Make meaningful state-level investment in domestic violence services and housing for survivors. The state of Rhode Island can provide immediate emergency relief to survivors using federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and through **annual state investment to support the life-saving advocacy services** provided by the RICADV and its network of member agencies serving victims of domestic violence. **State investment can address severe gaps in specialized services for the most vulnerable populations affected by domestic violence**, including people who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), immigrants, elderly, or LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming, people with disabilities and victims who are incarcerated. Rhode Island’s housing crisis has been jeopardizing the safety of survivors and their children since before the COVID-19 pandemic began. The state must allocate substantial and stable funds in the yearly state budget to **create specialized housing options for victims of domestic violence and build, renovate and increase capacity of domestic violence shelters.** Increased access to transitional housing units, where comprehensive victim advocate support and wraparound referral services are provided, and other forms of safe, affordable housing for survivors and their children will save lives.

Invest in the primary prevention of intimate partner violence to prevent abuse before it starts. Addressing the root causes of domestic violence through a public health approach can prevent abuse before it takes a devastating toll on Rhode Island communities. By ensuring all people

Recommendations

have access to living wage jobs, education, affordable housing and transportation, nutritious foods and green, open spaces such as parks, we can decrease the likelihood domestic violence will happen in the first place. Economic supports policies, such as raising the minimum wage and further closing the wage gap for women and people of color, can meet the needs of survivors of domestic violence while contributing to the overall health and wellbeing of Rhode Islanders, helping to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) before it has a chance to start. Investing in safe, affordable housing, universal infant and pre-K childcare and expanded paid leave and paid sick options for all workers can help create stable, supportive community conditions that protect against domestic abuse, reducing the rates of violence over time. As a longstanding recipient of CDC primary prevention funding, the RICADV has been implementing and evaluating public health prevention strategies in Rhode Island for nearly 20 years, in collaboration with local and state-level partners, such as the R.I. State Leadership Team for IPV Prevention. By building on existing primary prevention efforts and infrastructure and related public health initiatives, such as Rhode Island's Health Equity Zones (HEZ), the state can make strategic, sustainable investments to address root causes of domestic abuse and interrelated forms of violence.

Increase state investment in Rhode Island's Deborah DeBare Domestic Violence Prevention Fund (DVPF) within the state budget. The DVPF supports community-based primary prevention programs and initiatives to prevent domestic violence before it happens in the first place. Projects aim to create healthy relationships, safe, supportive environments and stable, nurturing community conditions to enhance protective factors that safeguard against violence. The goals of the DVPF are to increase the number of schools and community organizations taking a public health approach to prevent IPV and empower communities most impacted by IPV and its risk factors, including people of color, people who are LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities, to lead the solutions for ending violence. Through meaningful state investment in the DVPF, Rhode Island can make strides toward decreasing the risk of first-time IPV perpetration and ultimately reduce rates of IPV.

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A task force of the RICADV

For additional information and report copies: Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence
401-467-9940 | ricadv@ricadv.org | www.ricadv.org | 641 Bald Hill Rd., Suite 1, Warwick, R.I. 02886

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