

Fairfax County Leads Region in Domestic Violence Arrests

Fairfax County leads the region in domestic violence arrests, according to a newly released study by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services' Criminal Justice Research Center.

The study — Domestic Violence in Virginia 2006-2010 — claims that domestic violence arrests in Northern Virginia rose nearly 70 percent between 2006 and 2010. Arrests were most pronounced in Fairfax County, where they were up 306 percent during that five-year period.

Virginia domestic violence law mandates that responding law enforcement officers arrest “the predominant physical aggressor” in such cases, “unless there are special circumstances which would dictate a course of action other than an arrest.”

According to Fairfax County Police statistics for the county's 2012 fiscal year, there were a total of 1,796 domestic assault arrests during the period of July 2011 through June 2012.

According to another study — the 2010 National Intimate Partner & Sexual Violence Survey — one in three women living in Virginia have been stalked, assaulted or raped by an intimate partner. Based on that figure, the survey estimates that approximately 177,000 Fairfax County women will be victimized sometime in their lifetime by a family member or intimate partner.

Fairfax County Domestic Violence Coordinator Sandy Bromley believes the uptick in arrests outlined by the Criminal Justice Research Center study is primarily attributable to the fact that beginning in 2007, each of Fairfax County's eight district police stations was assigned a “domestic violence detective” whose primary focus is to investigate all domestic violence-related claims within their district.

Before leaving office late last month, that initiative was cited by outgoing Fairfax County Police Chief Dave Roher as one of his proudest achievements.

“Before that, all domestic violence cases were centralized,” Bromley said. “By having domestic violence detectives localized at each district station, it enables better training of patrol officers in each district and results in them being better educated to handle those issues within their own areas.”

According to the Criminal Justice Research Center study, as of 2010, 96 percent of all domestic violence arrests in Virginia involved assault offenses, such as aggravated assault, simple assault, and intimidation. “Generally, the local juvenile and domestic relations district court will handle such cases,” said H. Eugene Oliver, an attorney with Tully Rinckey PLLC in Arlington.

“That's true,” said Robert A. Bermingham, director of court services for Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. “Domestic violence is the engine that drives

this court.”

According to Bermingham, approximately 85 percent of all adults placed on probation by the court are due to domestic violence issues. “Domestic violence accounts for about half of all Fairfax County homicides,” Bermingham added.

Serious consequences can result from domestic violence, for both victims and perpetrators.

“Domestic violence arrests are as serious in consequence as they are sensitive in nature,” Oliver said. “A domestic violence conviction can impact a person’s life in many ways. Virginia does not allow expungements for those convicted of a misdemeanor, so even a simple assault conviction will stay on your record and potentially prevent you from getting jobs in the future.”

According to Bromley, the 306 percent increase in Fairfax County domestic violence arrests outlined in the Criminal Justice Research Center study is also noteworthy for another reason.

“Despite the increase in arrests, statistically we know that less than half of victims actually contact law enforcement,” she said.