



Opening Argument



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Our Domestic Violence Bureau Is a Model

Domestic violence has proven to be among the most difficult crimes to prosecute. One of the reasons is that each domestic violence case is a complex mixture of basic legal issues and complicated emotional and practical problems.

There are at least a half-million -- and by some estimates as many as four million -- violent victimizations each year of women across the United States at the hands of partners and spouses.

12,000 DV complaints

As many as 25% of the women visiting City hospital emergency rooms do so as a result of domestic violence. In Queens County there are up to 12,000 domestic violence complaints each year -- complaints that result in some 5,000 arrests.

Domestic abuse is the most common source of physical injury among women -- more frequent than car accidents, muggings and rapes combined. Its effects reach far beyond the women being battered.

Children, too, are its victims. In homes in which partner abuse occurs, children are 1,500 times more likely to be abused. Children raised in an abusive home too often lose their childhood to violence and face adult lives afflicted by deep psychological and emotional scars.

Domestic violence cases require special attention.

When I became Queens County District Attorney over a decade ago, I decided to set up a bureau staffed by specially-trained prosecutors and investigators to respond to the plight of the victims of this terrible crime.

Defendants live with their victims and the lives of both are inextricably linked by a tapestry of children, family and psychological bonds. Because of these unique circumstances, women are often reluctant to prosecute their abusers because they fear the loss of financial support

and the possible break up of their families.

Many women are afraid to proceed simply because they are unfamiliar with or intimidated by court procedures and the legal system. But studies show that prosecutorial action of any type lowers the risk of recurring violence by 50% within six months of disposition. Police action in coordination with other criminal justice efforts is a significant deterrent to further violence.

Our Domestic Violence Bureau is staffed by 15 Assistant District Attorneys who help protect the victims and their children by providing early outreach and specialized support services.

Early Outreach

A case is handled by the same Assistant District Attorney from start to finish. The key to effective and successful prosecution is early outreach and for that reason our DV Assistants are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In certain cases, when circumstances warrant, we proceed in bringing a case without the cooperation and testimony of the victim.

We are the first District Attorney's office in the state to use digital cameras on domestic violence arrests to enhance the prosecution and to provide the judge at arraignment powerful and compelling photographic evidence of physical injuries sustained by a victim.

In 2001 our dismissal rate in domestic violence cases was remarkably low -- only 25% compared with the citywide average of over 50%.

A federal audit of our Domestic Violence Bureau, which is supported by major federal and state grants, called it "an excellent model for other jurisdictions to emulate."

I am proud of our Domestic Violence Bureau, of its fine record and of its excellent reputation.