



TO: The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
United States Senate  
Committee on the Judiciary

FR: Nanci Kreidman, M.A.  
Chief Executive Officer

Domestic Violence Action Center (DVAC) is dedicated to alleviating the problem of domestic abuse in Hawaii. It is the only agency in the state of Hawaii providing direct services and inspiring community engagement to address this complex and costly problem. Positioned as a stand-alone organization the agency's work is designed to advocate for individual clients and mobilize the community. Founded and incorporated in 1990, DVAC began as a legal hotline with 2 part time staff. Today, the organization has grown to employ 48 staff and serve thousands of survivors of domestic violence through a comprehensive array of services that includes legal services and advocacy for victims, extensive support for families in the child welfare system suffering the harm of child and spouse abuse, civil and criminal court outreach, education about dating violence, professional training, public education, employer training, advocacy for teen victims, program development for ethnically specific communities, community organizing and technical assistance to the public and private sector. The Domestic Violence Action Center accepts high-risk, contested divorce, temporary restraining order (TRO), post-decree, and paternity cases and provides safety planning, crisis management, risk assessment, accompaniment, and bilingual advocacy.

The agency has been involved in almost every effort to examine the efficacy of the system's response to domestic violence. Invitations to serve on planning bodies and legislative bodies have allowed the expertise of staff to shape development and improvements.

DVAC has nearly 25 years of experience serving the civilian and the military communities, primarily on Oahu. It has been long noted that the survivors seeking our specialized services include military families and military family members. Despite efforts, previously, to dialogue about the impact this place on the agency's capacity to serve the civilian island families this is the first real initiative to fully understand the military use of community programs.



With clients active on the agency's caseload, staff routinely advocate for the myriad services and support a survivor needs as she/he seeks safety, custody, healthcare, mental health, financial and support services; and in particular for military survivors, sometimes relocation. The experiences with military members, commanding officers, and institutional agents vary greatly. Cooperation is not always forthcoming.

This discussion creates a fantastic opportunity to build and strengthen new relationships, partnerships and, ultimately support for families who are far from home, isolated and unfamiliar with the community they are residing.

In order to be more helpful in this discussion, the Domestic Violence Action Center captured data over a designated two week period to illustrate the range of services and the number of requests/inquiries received by military families.

During the two week period September 15 -30, 2014, 8 new cases were opened and 8 cases were closed. Safety planning, which is a key practice for survivors to prepare them and support them as they face danger, was conducted 40 times (safety planning is not a one time event, it is ongoing – to acknowledge changes in circumstances). Staff at DVAC's on site court (EXPO) program provided outreach at each stage of the temporary restraining order process to 6 survivors: that is a total of 12 survivors. Staff made 104 contacts with clients during that time and 52 contacts with others on their behalf. There were 92 children in those military families.

This data is underscored by data available from the Hawaii State Judiciary. On average, from 2009 – 2014 37.2% of all divorce cases sampled involved at least one member of the military. Those families where children are involved exceeds 50% in each of these years<sup>1</sup>

There is a great deal of work to be done. In order to be of best service to military families, DVAC would be delighted to participate in efforts to improve training, strengthen military-civilian collaboration and coordination.

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to offer these few thoughts and contribute to the discussion and development of strategy moving forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Military Divorce & its Effects on the Hawaii State Judiciary. An Analysis of Cases from 2009 - 2014