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## disORDERS of PROTECTION

A SPECIAL COURT that hears domestic violence cases  
is helping cops enforce laws that are easy for abusers to ignore.

By MARTHA ELLEN  
STAFF WRITER

Victims and their abusers stand calmly before Judge Barbara R. Potter at Integrated Domestic Violence Court of St. Lawrence County, their manner worlds apart from the behavior that brought them to the attention of the law.

The men and their female victims sit on opposite sides of a central aisle and don't steal a glance at one another as their cases are called.

A security officer hands out return date cards to defendants and victims as if they are, medical appointment reminders. Multiple return trips to the special court is part of the treatment to prevent more violent incidents.

"We want to make sure they're following the orders. If they're not, there's an immediate hearing," Judge Potter said. "By making them accountable, it works. It also allows us to coordinate services for victims."

IDV Court is a comprehensive approach to a long-standing problem which can push domestic violence victims and their families into multiple courts before different judges in varied locations. In IDV Court, each family has one judge who can weigh criminal charges, family circumstances and matrimonial disputes when domestic violence is an underlying issue.

St. Lawrence County IDV Court premiered in January, taking in cases from the county's main population centers. It will add neglect and abuse cases and expand into more rural areas. Jefferson and Lewis counties do not have courts similar to IDV

"I think eventually it will come," said Elaina F. Marra, executive director of the Victims Assistance Center of Jefferson County. "That type of court does streamline things for the families."

Abusers finding less room to maneuver will discover the future even less forgiving.

This fall, penalties increased for those who are repeat violators of orders of protection.

Under previous law, aggravated criminal contempt was limited to situations where the defendant hurt a victim who already had an order of protection.

The extra penalty kicks in if the defendant has been previously convicted of violating protective orders. The legislation increases the penalty from two to four years in prison for an E felony to a D felony with a maximum of three-and-one-half to seven years of prison time.

The bill received wide approval after a review of loopholes in laws related to women and children, Assemblywoman Dierdre K. Scozzafava, R-Gouverneur, said.

"Basically, you could violate an order of protection and not get in much trouble," she said. "This is just tightening the guideline."

Some counties are squeezing abusers in another way.

Plea bargaining of domestic violence cases has ended in Franklin County, District Attorney Derek P Champagne announced. in January as part of an aggressive prosecution campaign.

"Hopefully, that's a trend that will pick up. I think it's a start in' the right direction," said Molly E Nichols, a victim's advocate. "The other advantage is it takes the burden off the victim."