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New E-Orders Pilot Program Helps Protect Domestic Violence Victims

Westchester County this month became the first county in the state to serve orders of protection electronically, helping victims of domestic violence get the protection they need more quickly.

“There are women out there right now whose lives are in danger,” said County Executive Andrew Spano. “We need to do everything we can to protect them and their children, not put obstacles in their way. Electronic orders are quicker and easier to serve. That means that these women can get the protection they need sooner. I commend the Family Court and the White Plains Police Department for working with us to make electronic orders of protection a reality.”

With technology developed by the Westchester County IT Department, the Family Court in White Plains has begun electronically transmitting orders of protection to the White Plains Police Department in a pilot program the county hopes to expand to departments countywide. Previously, victims were required to pick up orders at the court and deliver them to police.

Supervising Judge of the Family Courts Judge Joan Cooney said the new e-orders program is an example of how agencies can work together to protect victims of domestic violence. “This is a very exciting way to use technology,” she said. “It helps victims of domestic violence. It is fair to the persons being served. It is a better system for everyone.”

White Plains Police Department is the first department in the county to accept the electronic orders. The way for the program was cleared last year after a state law was passed that recognized electronic documents and signatures as legally binding. It was recommended by Spano’s Domestic Violence Council.

So far, White Plains PD has received about 10 orders and the system is working well. Once the orders are received, police serve them on the party who is then required to respond to the court. The orders, which prohibit contact with the victim, give police a tool with which to protect domestic violence victims.

Judge Cooney said many victims are reluctant to report abuse to begin with. Having to deliver orders of protection to police, particularly in the community where the abuser lives, may be too frightening or difficult because of a lack of transportation.

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