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Texas Supreme Court Creates New Weapon to Fight Domestic Violence

The Texas Supreme Court and the Texas Access to Justice Commission on Tuesday released a new legal tool to help victims of domestic violence protect themselves from abusive partners.

A task force made up of family law practitioners, judges and prosecutors throughout Texas worked to create a Self-Help Protective Order Kit that victims can use to file their own applications for protective orders.

With it, low-income Texans can learn how to ask the courts to intervene in domestic violence cases, including how to remove an abusive partner from the home if necessary.

Texas First Lady Anita Perry, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott and Texas Supreme Court Justice Harriet O'Neill discussed the kit at a news conference in Austin.

More than 185,000 incidents of domestic violence were reported in Texas in 2003. That same year, 153 women were killed by an intimate partner. Having the kit might have helped save lives, particularly among those women who cannot afford to hire an attorney.

"Domestic violence has reached alarming levels in Texas, and often victims are too frightened or too financially strapped to get the help they need," Abbott says. "This kit addresses both of those problems by empowering victims to file their own court papers and get out of danger as quickly as possible."

The Protective Order Kit is available free at <http://www.texaslawhelp.org/>. The kit will be translated into Spanish and Vietnamese within the next six months.

The Texas Access to Justice Commission received a \$26,000 grant from the Texas Bar Foundation to help distribute the kit in both hard copy and CD format to law enforcement agencies, domestic violence shelters, medical facilities, court clerks and public libraries.

Time Warner Cable and KWEX-TV Univision in San Antonio donated production services for the development of English- and Spanish-language public service announcements, which will be aired statewide to publicize the kit.

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