

Denver District Attorney's Office Witness Protection Program

By Mitch Morrissey and Steven R. Siegel

INTIMIDATION OR HARM to victims and witnesses of crime is a considerable security concern for law enforcement, prosecutors and human service providers throughout the U.S. Victim Witness Protection Programs form an imperative part of local, state and national security by providing safety for victims and witnesses while ensuring that dangerous criminals are incapacitated. According to a review of Witness Protection Programs around the world, including the U.S., the protection of victims and witnesses is essential to acquiring convictions and maintaining public confidence in the effectiveness of governments to protect their citizens.

Victim and witness intimidation are particularly acute in the state of Colorado. The Denver District Attorney's Witness Protection Program was developed in response to this growing threat to victims and witnesses in criminal cases. The program has developed into a robust response to witness intimidation in the city and has grown from one part-time investigator to three investigators working these time-intensive cases. During its six years of operation, the Witness Protection Program has opened a total of 315 cases with in excess of 400 victims and witnesses protected. To date, the program has not had a single successful attack against its protected witnesses and victims that are in compliance with the program.

The Witness Protection Program employs three pillars of its operations to combat witness intimidation.

1) **Tactical VW Protection Strategies** — Tactical protection strategies are the cornerstone of the Program and these measures include threat intelligence gathering and analysis; security assessments; housing and transportation; interstate relocation; and jail and corrections housing strategies.

2) **VW Assistance Services** — Collaboration with system based and community based advocacy agencies is central to combatting the physical, economic, social, spiritual and emotional impact of a violent crime on individuals and their families. For victims/witnesses in high-risk cases, the initial impact of the crime is exacerbated by fear created through threats and intimidation. Maintaining collaboration with service agencies is essential to ensure victims/witnesses are adequately supported throughout the protection process.

3) **Lifestyle Transformation** — By nature, all protection cases involve some form of lifestyle change that can include physical relocation, change of employment or normal routine and limited communication with loved ones. However, cases where victims and witnesses are involved in high-risk lifestyles, such as gang involvement, drug addiction or the commercial sex industry, often demand intensive lifestyle transformation.

The Witness Protection Team utilizes each of these strategies in every case it handles to ensure individuals are provided with the most comprehensive protection services possible. The Team is on call day and night to respond to any new intelligence or threats from defendants while being attentive to the needs and concerns of protected individuals and their families. With all of that said, Witness Protection efforts are in dire need of a national network where cases can be transferred and best practices can be shared. For more information about this program, please visit: <http://www.denverda.org>.

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SAVE THESE DATES

Board Meetings and Conferences

NDA Board Meeting

Nov. 19–21, 2015
Palomar San Diego:
A Kimpton Hotel
1047 5th Avenue
San Diego, CA

Capital Conference

February 2–4, 2016
The Willard InterContinental
1401 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC

National Symposium on Domestic Violence

*Re-envisioning Evidence Based
Prosecution in America*
Oct. 28–29, 2015
The Westgate Hotel
1055 2nd Ave.
San Diego, CA