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RAMSEY COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE/  
SAINT PAUL CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
JOINT DOMESTIC ABUSE PROSECUTION UNIT  
EVALUATION REPORT

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA LAW SCHOOL

**Institute on Criminal Justice**  
**University of Minnesota Law School**

**Co-Directors**

Janet Wiig, JD, MSW  
Executive Director

Richard Frase, Professor of Criminal Law  
Director of Research

\* \* \*

Emily Shapiro, JD  
Senior Planning and Policy Associate

Robert Weidner, PhD  
Research Associate

Abigail Gewirtz, PhD  
Senior Planning and Policy Associate

Holly Miller, MA  
Planning and Policy Analyst

Cheryl Casey  
Associate Administrator

Katie Dupay  
Administrative Assistant

Abigail Gewirtz, Holly Miller, and Keri Zehm (Research Assistant) conducted the research for this study and prepared the report with administrative support from Katie Dupay.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<b>PAGE</b>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
INTRODUCTION .....	5
EVALUATION METHODOLOGY .....	7
JPU PROSECUTION DEMOGRAPHICS: 2000 – 2001 .....	9
IMPACT OF THE JPU .....	13
PROCESS EVALUATION – KEY AGENCY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS .....	19
APPENDIX A: Evaluation Plan .....	23
APPENDIX B: Preliminary Evaluation Report on Implementation Process .....	27
APPENDIX C: Outline for Victim Follow-Up Interviews .....	33
APPENDIX D: Questions for Stakeholders – Process Evaluation of the JPU .....	35
APPENDIX E: List of Agency Stakeholder Interviewees – Process Evaluation of the JPU .....	37



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings from the evaluation of the first year of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office/Saint Paul City Attorney's Office Joint Domestic Abuse Prosecution Unit (JPU). Qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis were used to answer questions about the effectiveness of the unit in achieving what it had planned to do: more efficient and stringent prosecution of domestic abuse cases where young children are present by attorneys who are cross-deputized at both the city and county level. The findings of this evaluation indicate clearly that the Joint Prosecution Unit has been highly successful in achieving improved prosecution outcomes in cases of domestic abuse where young children are present. The results of this evaluation also demonstrate that the JPU has been successful in achieving increased efficiencies in case processing. The JPU has achieved more modest results in terms of its desired impact on victims and child witnesses: helping victims access services and enhancing victim satisfaction with the court process.

The impact evaluation was undertaken through analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Data collected by the JPU about the court process and its resolution were statistically analyzed in order to answer questions about the successful prosecution of cases. Data from the 234 completed JPU cases were compared with a fairly matched control group of 447 domestic abuse cases prosecuted by both the Saint Paul City and Ramsey County Attorneys' Offices in the two years prior to inception of the JPU. Results of the comparisons indicated that JPU cases were prosecuted at a significantly more stringent level, for both the initial and final counts, as well as for the pleas (the final dispositions).<sup>1</sup> That is, while pre-JPU cases on average resulted in a plea to a slightly-more-than disorderly conduct level, JPU cases resulted, on average, in a plea to a slightly-more-than misdemeanor level.<sup>2</sup> In addition, significantly more JPU cases resulted in enhancements of charges from the initial to the final count.

Follow-up interviews were undertaken with victims to assess their attitudes and feelings about the court process in general and the added advocacy help in particular. Fewer than one-fifth of the victims were successfully contacted, but those who were located and agreed to be interviewed were generally pleased with the court process and the added service of a victim-witness advocate provided through the prosecution unit. Those who were dissatisfied with the process felt that the defendant was treated either too leniently or too harshly. (Those who felt the

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<sup>1</sup> As used in this report, "initial count" connotes the initial charge filed against the defendant. "Final count" means the charge amended by the prosecutor based on any further investigation. "Plea" refers to the offense of conviction whether through trial or a guilty plea.

<sup>2</sup> Although disorderly conduct (DOC) falls within a misdemeanor level of severity, there are important distinctions between a DOC in the context of a domestic incident and other misdemeanor level domestic assault charges: a DOC cannot be enhanced whereas a domestic assault-related misdemeanor can be when it is a repeat offense. Hence, the same defendant can plea to multiple DOCs on different occasions and, despite being a repeat domestic abuse offender, subsequent cases cannot be enhanced. On the other hand, if an offender pleads guilty to a domestic assault misdemeanor, the next time that he is charged with a domestic assault crime, the charge may be enhanced to a gross misdemeanor, etc.

latter claimed that the precipitating violent incidents were the fault of both parties, not just the defendant.)

The process evaluation was conducted to elicit information about the success of the JPU in operating according to the way it had been planned, and in achieving its stated aims. This evaluation consisted of interviews with fifteen key agency stakeholders across various systems, and results indicated that according to multiple stakeholders within the judicial system (judges, county and city attorneys, advocates within those offices, corrections, the police department and advocacy agencies), the JPU is successful in its attempts to more aggressively bring perpetrators of domestic assault to justice. Stakeholders noted, for example, that attorneys had more complete information about defendants (enabling charging decisions to be made more stringently), came well prepared to argue the case in court, and were perhaps more willing to go to trial than previously.

## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the findings of the impact and process evaluations of the Joint Domestic Abuse Prosecution Unit (JPU) following its first year of implementation. The report consists of four sections. The first includes a brief overview of the methodology utilized in the evaluation of the JPU. The second section documents initial descriptive data on the defendants, victims and child witnesses involved in the cases prosecuted by the JPU in its first year. The third section describes the results of the outcome evaluation analyses based on the JPU's first full year of cases (234 cases with disposition completed as of 10/31/01). These address both the prosecution outcomes (assessed through statistical analysis of JPU and other records) and the victim outcomes (assessed through ongoing victim satisfaction follow-up interviews, conducted by telephone between January and December 2001). The fourth and final section summarizes the results of the process evaluation: data from individual interviews conducted in December 2001 with key agency stakeholders.

### *The Joint Domestic Abuse Prosecution Unit (JPU)*

The JPU became operational on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000 as a joint unit of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office and the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office, and is located within the Ramsey County Attorney's Office. It was formed to prosecute all domestic abuse felony and gross misdemeanor cases in the City of Saint Paul where children are present, and all misdemeanor level cases where children under eleven are present or where children of any age are involved in the abuse. The goal of the unit is to decrease the fragmentation in the prosecution of domestic assault cases, thereby enabling more effective prosecution, resulting in more accountability for the perpetrator, and better services to victims and witnesses. The unit consists of three attorneys and one victim-witness advocate. The attorneys are cross-deputized: that is, each of them may prosecute cases involving misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors (routinely the purview of the City Attorney's Office) as well as felonies (the purview of the County Attorney's Office). The unit reports jointly to the Ramsey County Attorney and the Saint Paul City Attorney. The 2000 Minnesota Legislature provided first-year funding for the JPU, designating it as a pilot project. Funding for the second year of operation was appropriated by the 2001 Legislature.

### *Evaluation plan*

In summary, the evaluation asks two sets of questions:

- *Impact:* Is the JPU achieving its goals? The impact evaluation aims to answer two questions: Is the judicial process enhanced as a result of the creation of a joint prosecution unit (are cases handled more efficiently and expeditiously, and do the outcomes reflect enhanced attention to prosecution?), and are victims and child witnesses experiencing better service as a result (for example, are appropriate service referrals offered to victims?).
- *Process:* Is the JPU being implemented as it has been planned? Are the major stakeholders satisfied with the mode of operation and results of the JPU?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix A for the full evaluation plan.

The evaluation of the JPU was initially planned to span a three-year period beginning in September 2000. Studying the impact of the JPU over this period would allow for the sufficient documentation of the impact it has on defendants and victims, on the judicial process, on the Ramsey County and Saint Paul City Attorneys' offices, and on related city and county government agencies, such as the Saint Paul Police Department and Ramsey County Community Corrections. The prosecution process takes an average of three months from charging date to disposition. A three-year period (including an approximately six-month start-up time) would enable a full impact evaluation of approximately 1,000 cases (sufficiently large for statistical sampling purposes).

Several modifications were made to the evaluation plan due to a foreshortened evaluation time period, requests for additional information and, on occasion, gaps in the availability of data from different sources. For example, although the process evaluation was initially to be undertaken only in December 2000, another round of stakeholder interviews was requested by the County Attorney's Office in order to elicit feedback on the JPU following a complete year of operations. Also, since the total evaluation may take place over slightly less than a two-year period, rather than the three-year period initially planned for, some of the outcome/impact evaluation analyses (i.e. comparison of JPU cases with Saint Paul City Attorney domestic cases not involving children) were not completed at this time. In addition, some of the victim outcomes could not be analyzed due to significant data gaps. For example, it was not possible to track victim service utilization due to confidentiality issues. Finally, the original evaluation plan included analyzing police reports to determine whether all eligible reports of domestic abuse involving children were actually being referred to the JPU. While it was not possible to have direct access to police reports, the answer to this question was revealed by perusing domestic abuse reports handled by the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office, and learning that, in fact, all reports that met the JPU criteria were forwarded to the JPU for prosecution.

### ***Results of the preliminary evaluation***

The preliminary evaluation, completed in December 2000, reported on the JPU clients served for the unit's first four months of operation, and on information elicited from key stakeholders regarding the development and implementation of the unit. Key stakeholders overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the process of implementation of the Joint Prosecution Unit. They highlighted the advantages of having cross-deputized attorneys who could prosecute both misdemeanors and felonies in the same unit, and pointed to increased resources with which to prosecute cases. These key benefits, it was thought, were leading to more efficient communication and better prosecution of cases.

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The process evaluation of the JPU began in the fall of 2000, with initial satisfaction data gathered from key agency stakeholders in December 2000. Those findings were reported to the Ramsey County Attorney's Office and the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office in January 2001.<sup>4</sup> Satisfaction data from key agency stakeholders were gathered again in December 2001.

Evaluation of the impact of the JPU began in January 2001 as the first group of cases reached disposition. Evaluation involved the development of several JPU databases, to track the prosecution process, victim and child witness details, and prior criminal charges history of defendants. Data were entered into the database (for the most part by staff at the County Attorney's Office) as JPU cases proceeded through the court system. Evaluation of the impact of the JPU necessitated a statistical comparison of the JPU cases with a comparable group of domestic violence cases handled by the City and the County. Hence a database was developed, and tracking completed, of all domestic violence cases involving children that were prosecuted by the city and county for the two years prior to development of the JPU (1998-2000). This involved manual review of approximately 1700 cases at the City and County level, and classification of data within those cases along the same dimensions of classifications made for the JPU data. Information collected within the databases included demographic details of defendants, victims and witnesses, information on the types of charges at different stages of the prosecution (initial count, final count and disposition/plea)<sup>5</sup>, and information about the level of involvement of the children.

In order to statistically analyze and compare the criminal charges facing defendants at different stages of the prosecution process, charges were classified on a 5-point scale from 0 to 4, based on level of severity. Hence, 4 represented a felony charge, 3, a gross misdemeanor, 2, a misdemeanor, 1, a disorderly conduct charge, and 0, a charge that was dismissed, or a charge for which the defendant was found not guilty. Although disorderly conduct (DOC) falls within a misdemeanor level of severity, there are important distinctions between a DOC charged in the context of a domestic incident and other misdemeanor level domestic assault charges: a DOC cannot be enhanced whereas when a domestic assault-related misdemeanor is a repeat offense, it can be enhanced. Hence, the same defendant can be convicted of multiple DOCs on different occasions and, despite being a repeat domestic abuse offender, subsequent cases cannot be enhanced. On the other hand, if an offender pleads guilty to a domestic assault misdemeanor, the next time that he is charged with a domestic assault crime, the charge may be enhanced to a gross misdemeanor, and so on. For this reason, it was decided to give a DOC charge a less severe level than a domestic assault-related misdemeanor charge.

Victim satisfaction data were gathered beginning in January 2001, in accordance with plans for three-month follow-up interviews of adult female victims. The JPU database contained 234 cases involving 213 victims. Of these 213 victims, eight (4%) people refused to participate, 23 (11%) could not be reached, phone numbers for 140 (66%) disconnected, the wrong number, or

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Appendix B for initial evaluation report.

<sup>5</sup> For definitions of the terms "original count", "final count", and "plea", please see Footnote 1.

the client no longer lived there, four (2%) did not speak English. Thirty-eight (18%) interviews were completed. As the evaluation plan was being developed, several approaches to eliciting victim feedback via victim interviews were discussed. It was suggested that the optimal approach to ensuring client participation in feedback interviews would be to approach clients as they participated in the court process (i.e. when they were physically in the court building or the County Attorney's Office). However, concerns were raised about possible bias and/or coercion – that clients might feel compelled to provide feedback, particularly positive feedback, if they were approached in the courthouse or prosecutors' offices. Hence it was suggested that the feedback process be conducted separately from the processing of the client's case. However, given the relatively low rates of success in subsequently contacting victims, it is recommended for the future that in order to elicit feedback from the majority of clients, it is desirable to initiate the feedback process while clients are still in the court process, so that they may be contacted by the evaluator while they are meeting with the prosecutor or the advocate.

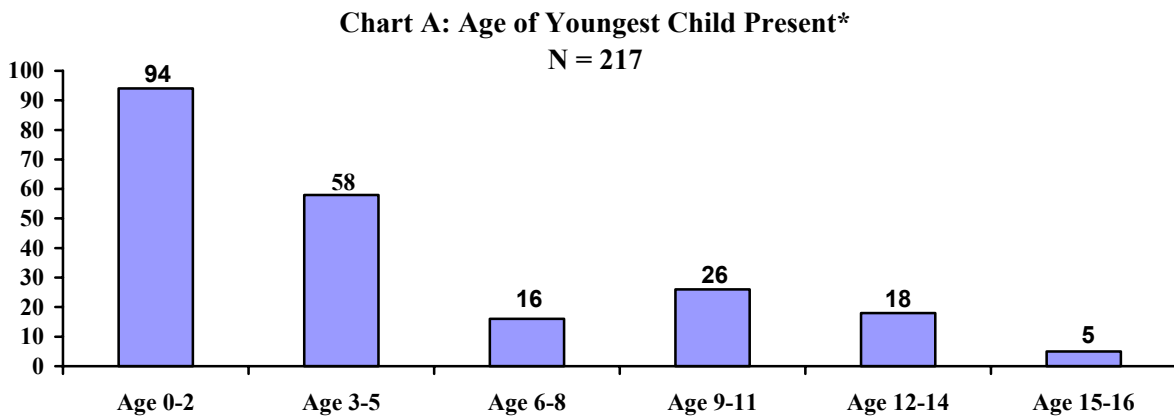
**JPU PROSECUTION DEMOGRAPHICS: 2000 – 2001**

As of October 31<sup>st</sup> 2001, the JPU had completed prosecution of 234 cases of domestic abuse involving children. These cases represented 213 different defendants and 213 different adult victims and 24 child victims.<sup>6</sup> Eleven defendants were female, and eleven of the adult victims were male. Just over one-quarter of the defendants were Caucasian and just over one-half Black, 9% were Hispanic, 6% Asian and 3% Native American. The age of offenders ranged from 18 to 54. The mean age was 31.3.

Twenty-one percent of JPU cases involved a weapon. Prior criminal history was known for 140 of the 213 defendants. Of these 140 individuals, more than four-fifths (113) had at least one prior criminal charge filed against them<sup>7</sup> and the numbers of prior charges ranged from 1 to 38, with a mean of 5.5 charges per individual defendant. Prior charges included felonies, misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors.

**Data on children**

The ages of the children involved in the domestic incidents prosecuted by the JPU ranged from newborn to 16 years.<sup>8</sup> The average age of the children was 4.53 years.



\* Chart reflects the age of the youngest child present at the time of the incident. If there were two or more children present and only one age was known, that age was used.

<sup>6</sup> One defendant had four cases, two had three cases and fourteen defendants had two cases prosecuted by the JPU during this time period.

<sup>7</sup> Data were available for class of charge (i.e. misdemeanor, felony, etc.), but not specifically for nature of charge (i.e. whether domestic violence related or not).

<sup>8</sup> Misdemeanor cases involving children over eleven were prosecuted by the JPU only when the child was a direct victim of the domestic abuse.

The child's level of involvement in the domestic incident was rated on a scale of increasing severity from 0 to 5, where 0 indicated that the child was sleeping or did not see or hear the violence, and 5 indicated that the child was a direct victim.<sup>9</sup> The modal level of involvement of the children in the incident was 2 – that is, in approximately 60% of the cases, the child or children were present for the incident, able to see and hear what was going on, but not physically involved in the violence. In approximately 18% of cases, children were actively involved in the violence – either by placing the 911 call, or by attempting to physically intervene, and in 11% of cases, children were direct victims of abuse themselves. In the remaining 11% of cases, children were reported to have been present at the time of the incident but unable to see the incident, or were reported sleeping at the time. Children were present in all cases prosecuted by the JPU. The specific number of children present is known in 51% of the cases. Numbers of children per victim ranged from 1 to 17, with a mean of 1.6 children per family.

### *Case outcomes*

Of the 234 cases prosecuted within the JPU thus far, 12 cases have resulted in dismissals and four cases in not guilty verdicts, 7 in disorderly conduct convictions, 128 in misdemeanor domestic abuse convictions (not misdemeanor DOCs), 36 in gross misdemeanor convictions and 47 in felony convictions.<sup>10</sup> Fifteen cases went to trial. Charges in 17 cases were enhanced, either because more information was gathered in the course of the investigation on the criminal history of the defendant, or because of compelling and consistent testimony from the victim. Enhancement of charges results in either a final count or a dispositional outcome that represents a charge higher than the initial count.<sup>11</sup> Please see Chart B for JPU case disposition data.

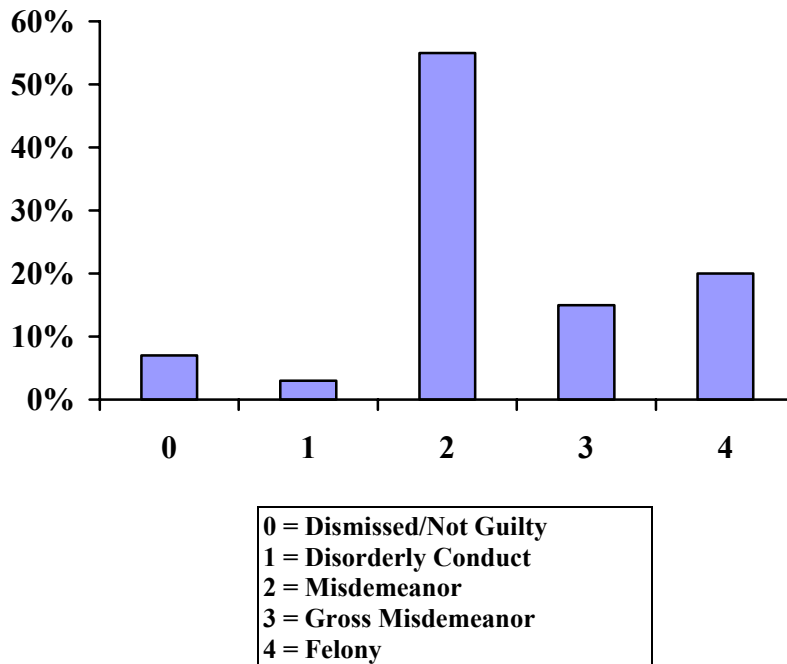
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<sup>9</sup> The scale was as follows: child was a direct abuse victim = 5, child was actively involved in the incident (e.g. by trying to break up fight by positioning him/herself between defendant and victim = 4, child dialed, or attempted to dial 911 = 3, child observed the incident from within or outside room (e.g. standing at the door, sitting in the corner) = 2, child heard incident but was in another location within the home and did not witness the incident = 1, child was in location of the incident but asleep at the time (i.e. neither saw nor heard the incident) = 0.

<sup>10</sup> When defendants faced multiple charges, the highest charge prosecuted is the one referred to.

<sup>11</sup> Please see next section – Impact of the JPU - for examples of cases that were enhanced.

**Chart B: Dispositional Outcomes**



The victim/witness advocate attempted to contact all victims, either by letter, telephone call or face-to-face meeting (through a home visit or meeting in the courthouse). 142 victims were referred for advocacy, counseling and other services, and 54 did not receive a referral, either because they refused services, were uncooperative with the advocate, or because the advocate was unable to locate them. There was no information in the database for the remaining 17 victims.

Of the 234 cases to date, 24 (11%) involved children directly as victims. Thirteen of these 24 child victims were referred for counseling and other services by the victim/witness advocate.



## IMPACT OF THE JPU

The 234 JPU cases, with prosecution completed from September 2000 to October 2001, were compared with a control group of all 447 domestic violence cases involving children that were prosecuted by the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office and the Ramsey County Attorney's Office between September 1998 and September 2000. Preliminary analyses indicated no differences between the two groups in terms of the numbers of children present, age of children, or the children's level of involvement in the domestic incidents. In regard to the type of incidents, there were no significant differences in the percent of cases that involved weapons (21% of the JPU cases involved weapons, as compared with 22% of the pre-JPU cases). Comparability of defendants could not be determined, as not all details available in the JPU database (e.g., information on prior offenses, as well as the age or race and defendants) were accessible for the pre-JPU group. However, discussions with prosecutors and police about whether the characteristics of domestic defendants have changed indicate that the two groups do not differ significantly in regard to key variables.

As noted above, the outcome/impact evaluation is concerned with measuring the effect of the JPU on prosecution outcomes. That is:

1. Do the charging outcomes and dispositions reflect enhanced attention to prosecution?
2. Are victims more satisfied with the court process as a result of the JPU and the availability of the victim-witness advocate?

### ***Findings: prosecution/dispositional outcomes.***

First, multiple regression analyses were used to determine the independent effects of several defendant and child-related factors on the final prosecution outcome (the plea) for JPU cases. Defendant factors included prior criminal history (assessed by number and types of prior charges) and race. Child factors included child's level of involvement in the incident (assessed on a scale of severity from 0 to 5 with 0 indicating that the child was present in the dwelling but did not see or hear the incident, and 5 indicating that the child was a direct victim), and child's age.<sup>12</sup>

Neither prior criminal history<sup>13</sup> nor race had an impact on the final pleas, but prior criminal history may have had an impact on sentencing.<sup>14</sup> Regarding the child-related factors, the child's level of involvement in the incident did not have a significant impact on the plea outcome; that is, the degree of involvement of the child or children did not impact the severity of the plea.

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<sup>12</sup> Where more than one child was present, the youngest child's age was taken for the purpose of recording age data, and the highest level of involvement was elicited for the purpose of recording involvement data.

<sup>13</sup> Prior criminal charges were only listed for one-third of the JPU cases. Thus, results should not be considered to be necessarily representative of the group as a whole.

<sup>14</sup> The analysis of the relationship between prior criminal history and sentence, however, was not within the purview of this evaluation, and was therefore not undertaken.

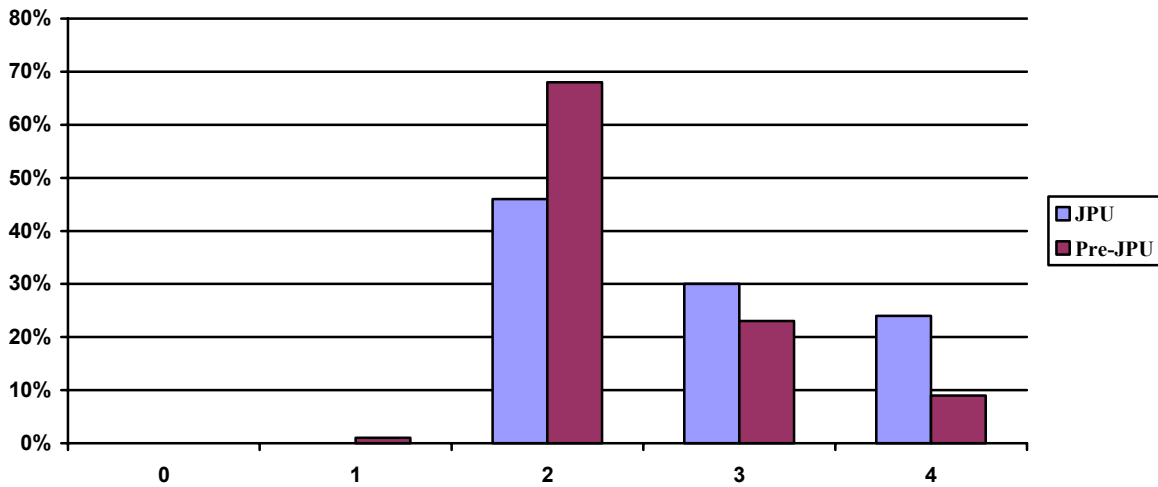
However, the age of the child did. That is, the older the child was at the time of the incident, the more severe the plea was likely to be.

Next, the JPU group of cases was compared on several outcomes with the 447 domestic abuse cases prosecuted by both the Saint Paul City Attorney’s Office and the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office between 1998 and 2000, prior to the development of the JPU. The pre-JPU and JPU groups were compared on a number of prosecution outcomes: original charge/count, final count, and the charge the defendant finally pled to, in order to determine whether JPU cases faced more stringent prosecution outcomes. In addition, comparisons were made between the numbers of cases enhanced. For the original count, cases were divided into four classes – disorderly conduct, misdemeanor domestic abuse, gross misdemeanor and felony. For the final count and plea outcomes, cases were divided into five classes – dismissed/found not guilty, disorderly conduct, misdemeanor (usually domestic assault), gross misdemeanor, and felony.

Multiple Chi Square tests were conducted to determine whether there were significant differences between the two groups (pre-JPU and JPU) on the frequencies with which cases led to different prosecution outcomes. Charts C, D and E illustrate the distribution of charges for the three prosecution outcomes (original count, final count and plea/dispositional outcome) across JPU and pre-JPU time periods.

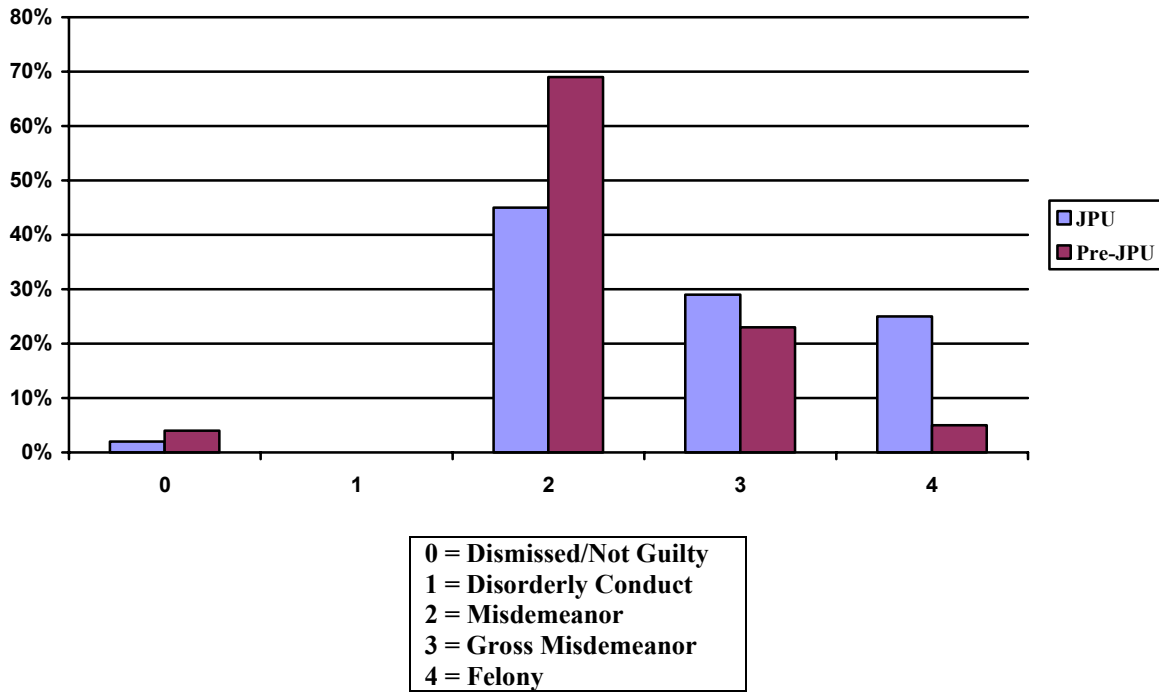
### Charts C-E: Distribution of Charges

Chart C: Original Count

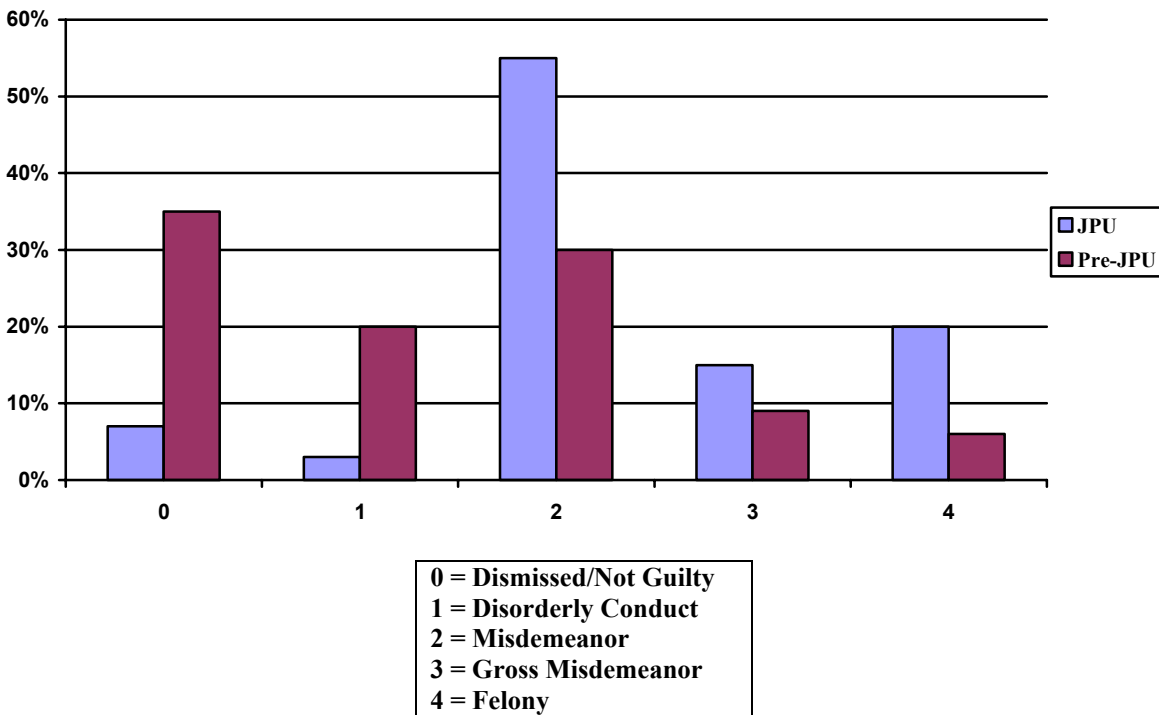


0 = Dismissed/Not Guilty  
 1 = Disorderly Conduct  
 2 = Misdemeanor  
 3 = Gross Misdemeanor  
 4 = Felony

**Chart D: Final Count**

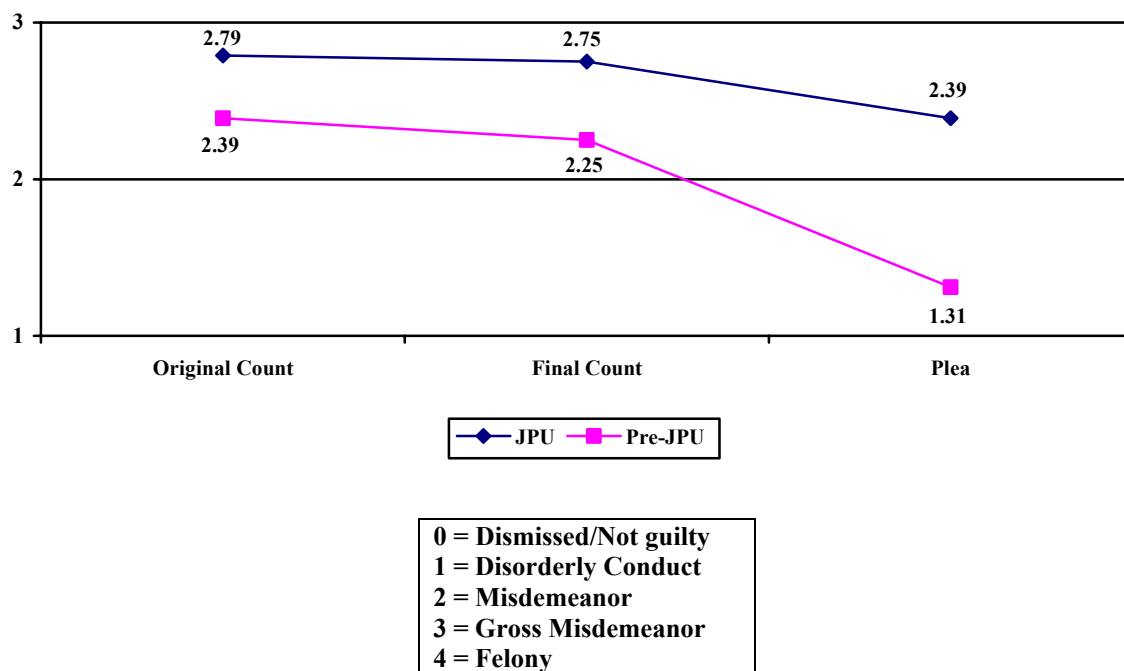


**Chart E: Dispositional Outcomes**



Significant differences were found between charging severity at all stages of the prosecution, between the pre-JPU and JPU groups. At the original and final count stages, the average charge for the JPU was a high-level misdemeanor (meaning that most original and final counts were either misdemeanors or gross misdemeanors); for the pre-JPU period, the average charge was much closer to a misdemeanor. The differences are most apparent at the plea/dispositional outcome stage – while the average plea for the pre-JPU period was only just above a disorderly conduct, for the JPU group of cases, the average plea was above a misdemeanor. Indeed, as noted both in the stakeholder interviews and in the descriptive statistics above, very few JPU cases resulted in disorderly conduct pleas. Chart F illustrates graphically the differences in the severity of charges for the pre-JPU and JPU periods.

**Chart F: Differences in the Severity of Charges**



The numbers of cases enhanced were also compared across the two time periods, demonstrating significantly more enhancements for the JPU period relative to the pre-JPU period. Enhancements usually involved raising a charge from an initial misdemeanor to a final count of a gross misdemeanor or felony, based on further information gathered about the case.

The following case examples illustrate how the extra resources afforded the JPU directly result in an increased ability to enhance charges due to a more comprehensive investigation and more informed charging decisions. For example, a misdemeanor domestic assault charge was made in a case involving a defendant who assaulted a victim by punching her in the face. From the information provided through a medical release signed by the victim, the prosecutors ascertained that the doctor had noted that the victim’s swollen face and cut lip amounted to temporary disfigurement. This temporary disfigurement enabled the prosecutors to raise the charge to a third degree assault – a felony charge, on which the defendant was tried and convicted. (This, despite the victim ultimately testifying for the defendant in the trial.) A second example of case

enhancement involved another assault – the defendant punched the victim in the mouth, causing her to lose a tooth. An initial misdemeanor domestic assault charge was raised to a felony level (first degree assault) as the result of permanent loss of a bodily member (the tooth), and the defendant was convicted of the felony charge, and sentenced to prison. A final example involves a defendant for whom no prior charges were found in either Ramsey or Hennepin County's computer system, but who had lived in Minneapolis prior to moving to Ramsey County. A call by the prosecuting JPU attorney to the Hennepin County Courts revealed that the defendant had indeed had a prior domestic assault conviction (which had not been entered into the computer – as is often the case with misdemeanor level cases). This prior conviction enabled the prosecutor to enhance the current charge to a gross misdemeanor level, and prosecute the defendant successfully.

### ***Findings: Client Satisfaction Interviews***

The goal of victim/client follow-up interviews was to elicit information regarding client satisfaction with the JPU advocacy and prosecution services. Those clients who were contacted in-person (either by telephone or face-to-face) by the victim/witness advocate were informed that they would be contacted for a follow-up interview several months following their interactions with the JPU. In fact, contacting clients was quite challenging, and ultimately, of 213 victims, only 38 interviews (18% of possible interviews) were completed.<sup>15</sup> (For methodological recommendations related to the difficulty in recruiting interviewees, please see earlier section on Evaluation Methodology.) The interviews were conducted over the telephone between January and December of 2001.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that because so few victims were interviewed, it is possible that those who were interviewed were not representative of the group of victims as a whole, and hence the results of the interviews should be understood in this context.

All interviewees were women. All but one of the women interviewed had custody of their children.

**Prior involvement with the court.** Most respondents (71%) replied that they had not had prior involvement with the courts as a domestic assault victim. Those who said they had been involved with the courts previously (29%), noted that overall that there were no differences. However, one woman commented that this time the defendant's sentence was longer and that he received jail time instead of receiving probation.

**Aspects of the court process that were seen as helpful by the victim.** Victims reported that the advocate and the prosecutors were supportive and available and that the communication received from all sources about the case was helpful. Victims also noted that JPU staff was able to ensure that the perpetrator was kept away from her and her children and that he was ordered to comply with the necessary requirements.

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<sup>15</sup> The JPU database contained 234 cases with 213 victims. Of these 213 victims, 8 (4%) people refused to participate, 23 (11%) could not be reached, phone numbers for 140 (66%) were disconnected, the wrong number, or the client no longer lived there, 4 (2%) did not speak English. Thirty-eight (18%) interviews were completed.

<sup>16</sup> Please see Appendix C for victim interview questions and format.

**Information that should have been provided but was not.** Seventy-five percent of the victims commented that there wasn't any information left out and believed everything was explained to them. Of those who felt otherwise, victims reported being confused about why the defendant was deported and why the charge the defendant was arrested for was different than the one he ended up charged with.

**Help with family issues.** Two thirds of the victims stated they had received either phone numbers or brochures for family services.

**Concerns about children/seeking help for children.** The ages of the children of the women interviewed ranged from three months to fourteen years of age. Eighty-one percent of the victims commented they did not have concerns about their children and have not looked for services. However, almost half of these women had children who were two years old or younger; therefore, they may have considered their children too young for services. In addition, time and transportation seemed to act as obstacles for those who were interested in services. Of the 19% of victims who reported they had sought services, these services included counseling at Wilder, and counseling through the child's probation officer.

**Seeking/receiving services for herself.** More than three-quarters of the participants stated that they had not received services. Of those who had sought or received services, respondents named parenting classes and counseling as examples of services sought and/or received.

**Fairness of the court process.** Seventy-one percent of the participants were happy with the court process. Twenty-nine percent stated they were dissatisfied. Those who were unhappy with the process attributed their dissatisfaction to the courts being either too harsh or too lenient. Examples of comments included: "He should have gotten more time," "It took two years to get an Order for Protection and that things had to get really bad before the courts helped me," "We could have dealt with this on our own; I'm upset about the no contact order since we have a child together."

**Life or relationship changes as a result of this court process.** Overall, participants were mixed in their responses to how their lives had changed. Forty-nine percent stated their lives had not changed. Fifty-one percent stated that their lives had changed. Those who stated it did change their lives gave the following examples: "I choose my boyfriends better," "It changed me emotionally," "I need to find a place to live and transportation," "It's hard for my child not to have a dad," "Him getting help, helped," "I have more faith in the justice system and feel police officers and the court is there to help," "My self-esteem has improved; I appreciated how they never said the incident was my fault, and the intervention helped with his anger."

**Other comments.** Overall, participants enjoyed the chance to provide feedback for the Joint Prosecution Unit. One woman commented that she felt the treatment would be more effective if it involved having the offenders realize how their behavior impacted their children, instead of focusing on anger management issues.

## PROCESS EVALUATION - KEY AGENCY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

In order to gather information regarding the operations and perceived results of the JPU, fifteen key stakeholders were individually interviewed using a semi-structured interview format to elicit reactions and determine the level of satisfaction with the services provided by the JPU. Individuals were interviewed face-to-face by the JPU evaluator.<sup>17</sup>

Interviewees represented the Saint Paul Police Department, Ramsey County District Court, domestic abuse (counseling and advocacy) agencies in Saint Paul, Ramsey County Community Corrections, the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office and the Ramsey County Attorney's Office.<sup>18</sup> The majority of those interviewed were interviewed previously for their comments on the development of the unit (December 2000). Individuals interviewed included those within the court system, individuals providing direct services to victims, and officials in supervisory and key policy positions. They had varying levels of involvement with the JPU, from one individual who works full time within the unit, to an individual with a community agency who was involved in outside meetings with unit members on domestic abuse issues. Nonetheless, the comments of the interviewees provide valuable feedback regarding the process of service provision of the JPU as it enters its second year.

### *General Findings*

All interviewees agreed that the JPU has changed the way domestic violence cases involving children are handled, as compared with prior handling by both City and County Attorneys' offices. Interviewees overwhelmingly highlighted positive changes in the way domestic violence cases are handled within the JPU. Depending on the nature of their involvement, the interview subjects highlighted different aspects of the changes. For example, those within the City and County Attorneys' offices highlighted case handling issues (cross-deputization, the vertical charging unit) while those in other agencies highlighted the impact of the advocacy services, increased communication, and the benefits of focusing on cases where children are involved.

**Efficiency of case processing and handling.** Increased resources to domestic abuse cases involving children, with cross-deputized attorneys, were highlighted as contributing toward more efficient case processing and handling. Interviewees highlighted the smaller attorney caseload (relative to the City Attorney's misdemeanor caseload) and the added resource of a victim/witness advocate, as allowing attorneys to devote more attention and resources to any given case (enabling more investigation and communication with other agencies such as Community Corrections). This, it was felt, has resulted in more aggressive, successful prosecution and faster disposition of cases.

**Case charging.** The cross-deputization of assistant city and county attorneys within the JPU has enabled cases to be charged with more efficiency, making it easier to correct or add charges and

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<sup>17</sup> Please see Appendix D for interview questions.

<sup>18</sup> Please see Appendix E for list of interviewees.

avoid jurisdictional questions between the two (City and County) offices. Interviewees suggested that this has resulted in cases now being charged as “what they are”, more aggressively and at higher levels than previously, when they may have been charged down due to a lack of resources. The JPU has sufficient resources to conduct further investigation into the prior record of the defendant for purposes of enhancing the charge or to request further police follow-up. Several interviewees cited a significant drop in the numbers of plea agreements to disorderly conduct charges (as opposed to misdemeanor domestic assault or more severe charges).

**Case disposition.** Interviewees mostly felt that cases are being disposed of more quickly, and that because of the single charging unit, the JPU cases appear to be resulting in more stringent and, sometimes, enhanced sentences. The judges interviewed all pointed out that having the same prosecutors prosecuting all the domestic violence cases in which young children are witnesses enables both prosecutors and judges to follow through on policies regarding the prosecution and disposition of these cases. Prosecutors interviewed felt that the JPU has ‘passed muster’ among defense attorneys, who now no longer attempt to have cases dismissed with the frequencies with which they were so doing prior to the JPU. Both judges and prosecutors also noted that JPU prosecutors seem unafraid to go to trial, even though they (interviewees) noted that when cases do go to trial, the JPU attorneys may not have any more chance at a successful outcome than the City and County Attorneys had prior to the unit’s inception. Nonetheless, all noted that the willingness of the JPU attorneys to go to trial was a positive and important factor – as it demonstrates to both defendants and their defense attorneys that the prosecutor will not back away from prosecution.

**Changes in victim and witness experience.** This was the area within which most interviewees felt that progress was slowest. Without exception, interviewees noted the benefits of having a victim-witness advocate. However, several also noted that having an advocate had highlighted the need for outreach workers to contact women in their homes and communities, rather than providing a solely court-based service. Some also expressed disappointment that despite the services of an advocate, women victims were still often unwilling to testify in significant numbers and sometimes had to be subpoenaed to participate in the court process. Others said that they had hoped that the JPU victim/witness services would result in more education for judges and prosecutors about the resources available to victims and witnesses. They had also hoped that the JPU would result in significantly better access to community resources for victims than has been achieved.

Police Department respondents reported that having a joint prosecution unit was advantageous for victims as it offers a single ‘address’ for victims who are seeking information about their case. Previously, victims may have had to call both the city and the county to get case information if they did not know the final jurisdictional destination.

**Enhanced awareness of domestic abuse cases involving children.** Several interviewees suggested that the implementation of the JPU has served to enhance awareness within the county of the significance of domestic violence cases that involve children, and the negative consequences for children of their involvement in these cases. For example, one respondent reported that more children’s names are present on police reports of domestic incidents than prior

to the JPU, suggesting that police officers may now be more aware of the children present at a scene of domestic violence and of the importance of noting their presence. Another respondent noted that the media seem to be highlighting child witnesses in the context of domestic violence. Susan Gaertner, the Ramsey County Attorney, noted that “We have a core of committed, informed individuals coalescing around the issue of family violence.” Several respondents reported that they hoped that the criminal justice system’s approach toward domestic violence crimes involving children was slowly evolving in the same direction as the stringent approach the justice system takes toward drunk driving offenses.

**Enhanced communication.** Similar to the feedback received from stakeholders in 2000, a significant benefit highlighted by all those interviewed, regardless of their roles in relation to the JPU, was the significant increase in communication flow between agencies with information about domestic violence perpetrators and defendants. Many felt that this information is now being shared in a more efficient way – to the benefit of all parties involved in domestic abuse proceedings. For example, all JPU attorneys are familiar with local corrections officers and consult with them in order to gather defendant information.

Prosecutors noted that more frequent and formalized communication between the City and County Attorney’s offices has allowed more information to be exchanged on domestic violence cases in general, resulting in a higher level of cooperation and collaboration. In addition, the dedication of a unit within the County Attorney’s Office to domestic violence has allowed for more specialization, leading, it is hoped, to better prosecution of these difficult cases.

**Changes in judges’ rulings.** Some respondents noted that the development of the unit may have enhanced the awareness of the judges involved in domestic abuse cases of the impact of domestic violence on both adult victims and their children. In some cases, this has resulted in judges passing more stringent rulings in JPU cases than they would have handed down prior to the JPU’s development. Judges, however, attributed this stringency to attorneys prosecuting cases better, armed with more information and appearing in court better prepared for the prosecution.

**Potential disadvantages/unintended consequences or pitfalls.** Some within the Attorneys’ offices noted that offering victim/witness advocacy services had increased their awareness of the needs of victims for services for themselves and their children. A grant application submitted to the State of Minnesota to provide funding for an outreach worker to support the JPU advocate by reaching out to victims at their residence or in their communities was unsuccessful; it was noted that much more remains to be done in order to help victims and witnesses through the domestic abuse prosecution process.

### ***Summary of findings***

As was found through interviews conducted one year ago, key stakeholders overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the Joint Prosecution Unit. Key points highlighted included the advantages of having cross-deputized attorneys who could prosecute both misdemeanors and felonies in the same unit, and increased resources, with attorneys prosecuting fewer cases and a victim/witness advocate providing additional services. These key benefits have led to more

efficient communication and processing of cases, with the most significant result being that perpetrators of domestic abuse involving children are punished appropriately and are not allowed to “slip through cracks” in the criminal justice system.

## APPENDIX A Evaluation Proposal

- A. Process Evaluation (goal of evaluating the effectiveness of implementation with key stakeholders).
- i. Satisfaction with JPU development and services by key stakeholders as determined by surveys and focus groups.
    - Conduct three focus groups with randomly selected participants within the JPU (e.g., attorneys, advocates, judges) (Months 1-4)
    - Develop satisfaction surveys for victims
    - Organize, analyze and summarize survey and focus group data (Months 4-15)<sup>19</sup>
  - ii. Develop a tracking system for referrals into the JPU. (This is necessary in order to make sure that all cases eligible for referral to JPU are actually being referred. It is also critical for outcome evaluation—i.e. to make sure that any results aren't tainted by circumstances beyond JPU's control, i.e. problems with referral).
    - Review all police domestic violence reports generated from 9/00 onwards using a blind rater to gauge whether children were involved to the extent of fulfilling criteria for referral to the JPU. (Months 1-33)
    - Analyze reports to compare cases ultimately referred with those not referred to determine reasons for lack of referral. Cases will be compared on several variables (e.g. type of incident, age of children, use of weapon). (Months 5-33)<sup>20</sup>
- B. Outcome Evaluation
- i. Outcomes requested for measurement by JPU staff include:
    - Victim outcomes, i.e., increased safety and use of services by victims and children
    - Prosecution outcomes, i.e., increased rates of conviction and sentencing, more stringent probation, more court-ordered treatment
  - ii. Victim outcomes: (service utilization, safety) Develop comprehensive tracking system to track victim and child witness data as victims enter the JPU
    - Develop database/design coding sheet in collaboration with victim/witness advocate, to record victim and witness information. (Months 1-3)
    - Design survey questionnaire to gauge victim's utilization of services offered, from introduction to advocate onwards (e.g. number of services offered, number

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<sup>19</sup> The results of the semi-structured interview data will be available for the interim process evaluation report in January 2001.

<sup>20</sup> It is understood that in January 2001, police reporting will become computerized, enabling easier tracking of cases involving children. Hence, to avoid confounding due to newer reporting methods, analysis of reports will begin after 2001.

- accepted, previous service utilization as reported by victim, services offered and engaged in by child witness (es). Victims will be surveyed over the telephone three months after entry into the system. (Months 1-4).
- Track numbers of women availing themselves of advocate services of in-house advocates vs. other advocate vs. none. (Months 1-32)
  - Track numbers of children receiving services for their exposure to DV. (This will be accomplished by asking caregivers in the 3-month follow-up survey). (Months 1-32)
  - Follow-up after three months (telephone calls) to ascertain satisfaction with JPU, and to gauge service utilization and continued DV exposure. (Months 1-32)
- iii. Prosecution outcomes (sentencing, testimony, etc.)
- Develop comprehensive tracking system to track cases through the court process following implementation of the JPU (this is a necessary prerequisite to outcome evaluation).
- iv. Design coding sheet to record information on victim, child witness(es), charges, court activity (continuances), victim participation in court process (agreement to testify, no-shows), length of court process. (Months 1-3)
- Track number of continuances (Months 1-32)
  - Track number of no-shows (Months 1-32)
  - Track numbers of victims testifying (Months 1-32)
- v. Compare the victim testimony and prosecution rates in domestic violence cases involving children, before and after the creation of the JPU.
- Review all JPU cases for the first two-and-a-half years, comparing them with a matched sample of DV/child cases from the two-and-a-half years prior to the development of the JPU. Cases will be compared in two categories: those previously handles by the city (i.e. misdemeanors) and those previously handled by the county (i.e. gross misdemeanors and felonies) - in order to control for jurisdictional differences in case handling. Groups will be matched for age of children involved, and type of incident (including type of weapon). Blind raters will rate police reports on the aforementioned variables. (Months 5-31)
  - Matched groups will be compared on the following outcomes: victim testimony, and rates of prosecution. (Months 31-32)
- vi. Compare the sentencing outcomes of domestic violence cases involving children, before and after the creation of the JPU.
- vii. Review a random sample of DV cases comparing the 2 ½ years prior to the initiation of the JPU with the first 2 ½ years of the JPU. Cases will be compared in two categories: those previously handled by the city (i.e. misdemeanors) and those previously handled by the county (i.e. gross misdemeanors and felonies) - in order to control for jurisdictional differences in case handling. Groups will be matched for age of children involved, and type of incident (including type of weapon). Blind raters will rate police reports on the aforementioned variables. (Months 5-31)

- vii. Matched groups will be compared on outcomes, using regression analyses: length of sentence (continuous variable), amount of treatment ordered (continuous variable), ratio of sentence ordered to sentence completed, ratio of treatment ordered to treatment completed. (Months 31-32)
- viii. Compare the outcomes of DV cases with children actively involved (i.e. those referred to JPU) with DV cases without child involvement. (If it is found that a significant number of eligible cases for the JPU are not actually being referred to the unit, this “control” group of child-involved non-JPU cases would serve as a valuable comparison group).
- ix. Review a random sample of police reports of DV cases with no child involvement (preferably couples with no children in the home). Match this group with JPU cases on the following criteria: number and type of prior convictions, type of incident (including type of weapon). Blind raters will rate police reports on the aforementioned variables. (Months 5-31)
- x. Matched groups will be compared on outcomes, using regression analyses: length of sentence (continuous variable), amount of treatment ordered (continuous variable), ratio of sentence ordered to sentence completed, ratio of treatment ordered to treatment completed. (Months 31-32)

**PRODUCT TO BE DELIVERED WITHIN YEAR 2**

- A. End of year one evaluation report (to include data gathered until 10/31/01). Report will be submitted on 12/15/01 and will consist of:
  - i. Brief overview of evaluation methodology
  - ii. Results of process evaluation, including end-of-year satisfaction data (based on fifteen key stakeholder interviews to be conducted in 9/01 and 10/01).
  - iii. Descriptive data on clients served
  - iv. Results of outcome evaluation to date (outcome data and analysis for all cases disposed of by 10/31/01)
- B. End of second year report, to be completed June 30, 2002. Report will consist of:
  - i. Overview of evaluation study
  - ii. Outcome evaluation data
  - iii. Summary and integration of JPU evaluation over first two years
  - iv. Recommendations



**APPENDIX B**  
**Preliminary Evaluation Report on Implementation Process**  
**December 27, 2000**

**Introduction.** This preliminary report will consist of three sections. The first includes a brief overview of the methodology to be utilized in the evaluation of the Joint Prosecution Unit (JPU). The second section summarizes initial satisfaction data as measured by individual interviews conducted in December 2000 with key stakeholders, and the third section documents some initial descriptive data on clients served by the JPU from September to December 2000.

**Evaluation methodology and plan.** The evaluation of the JPU is planned to span a three-year period beginning with initial implementation of the JPU (September to December 2000). Studying the impact of the JPU over this period will allow for the sufficient documentation of the impact it has on defendants and victims, on the judicial process, on the County and City Attorney's office, and on related city and county government agencies, such as the police department and community corrections. The prosecution process, takes an average of three months from charging date to disposition. A three-year period (including an approximately six-month start-up time) will enable a full impact evaluation with at least 1000 clients (sufficiently large for statistical sampling purposes).

In summary, the evaluation asks two sets of questions:

1. Is the JPU being implemented as it has been planned? I.e., Are the major stakeholders in agreement that implementation is going as planned? Are key stakeholders satisfied with the JPU implementation and process of working? And – are the correct referral mechanisms in place such that all cases meeting JPU referral criteria are actually being referred?
2. Is the JPU achieving its goals? The impact evaluation will focus on answering two questions: Is the judicial process enhanced as a result of the creation of a joint prosecution unit (are cases handled more efficiently and expeditiously, and do the sentencing outcomes reflect this?), and are victims and child witnesses experiencing better service as a result (are victims cooperating with the judicial process more often, are appropriate service referrals offered to victims?).

Evaluation of the impact of the JPU will begin in January 2001, as the first group of cases reach disposition, and will involve a detailed tracking of all cases, and comparisons of cases with other domestic violence cases prosecuted by both the city and county. Evaluation of the process of implementation of the JPU has already begun, with initial satisfaction data summarized in section two of this report. Victim satisfaction data will be gathered beginning in January 2001, as the first cases reach disposition, and in accordance with plans for three-month follow-up interviews of adult female victims.

**Initial satisfaction data – stakeholder interviews.** In order to elicit information regarding the initial process of implementation of the JPU, twelve key stakeholders were individually interviewed using a semi-structured interview format to determine level of

satisfaction with the JPU. Individuals were interviewed either over the telephone (4 interviews) or in-person (8 interviews) by the JPU evaluator.

Interviewees represented the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, the Saint Paul Police Department, the Ramsey County District Court, the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office, domestic abuse (counseling and advocacy) agencies in Saint Paul, and Ramsey County Community Corrections (please see Appendix C for list of interviewees). Individuals interviewed included both those providing direct services to victims, and/or defendants, as well as those in supervisory and key policy positions. They had varying levels of involvement with the JPU, from two individuals who work full-time within the unit, to an individual with a community agency who had not yet received a referral from the JPU, but was involved in outside meetings with unit members on domestic abuse issues. All individuals without exception noted their hesitation in providing opinions about the JPU so early on in its inception; most requested to be re-interviewed in mid-2001, and all noted that it was too early to make any definitive judgments about the impact of the JPU. Nonetheless, the comments of the interviewees provide valuable feedback regarding the process of implementation to date of the JPU as well as the process of service provision.

Results of the stakeholder interviews:

(a) Involvement in development of JPU:

All interviewees (or agencies they represented) felt appropriately involved in the development of the JPU. All noted that representatives of the JPU or the County Attorney's Office had either consulted with them around the development of the JPU, or presented the details of the concept of the JPU to them, prior to its actual inception. Stakeholders also felt that the JPU's operation is consistent with the model of the JPU as conceived of prior to its implementation.

(b) Changes in the charging, handling, processing and disposition of domestic violence cases involving children:

All interviewees agreed that there were changes in the way domestic violence cases involving children (i.e. those currently prosecuted within the JPU) are being handled, as compared with prior handling by both City and County Attorneys' Offices.

Interviewees overwhelmingly highlighted positive changes in the way domestic violence cases are handled within the JPU, and depending on the nature of involvement, highlighted different aspects of the changes. For example, those within the City and County Attorney's office highlighted case handling issues (cross-deputization, the vertical charging unit) while those in other agencies highlighted the impact of the advocacy services, increased communication, and the benefits of focusing on cases where children are involved.)

- (i) Efficiency of case processing and handling: Increased resources to the JPU, and the increased efficiency of having a vertical charging unit with cross-deputized attorneys were highlighted as contributing towards more efficient case processing and handling. Interviewees highlighted the smaller attorney caseload (relative to the City's

- misdemeanor caseload) and the added resource of a victim/witness advocate, as allowing attorneys to devote more attention and resources to any given case (allowing for more investigation and communication with other agencies such as community corrections). This, it was felt, should ultimately result in closer contact with the victim, leading to increased cooperation from the victim, and faster disposition of cases.
- (ii) **Case charging:** The cross-deputization of city and county attorneys within the JPU has enabled cases to be charged with more efficiency, making it easier to add or amend to charges and without the concern about cases moving back and forth between the two (City and County) offices. Similarly, in more serious cases where the charging officer has not recognized the case as a felony, the case can be subsequently charged as a felony (again, without needing to be transferred between offices). It was also the observation of some of those interviewed that due to sufficient resources of time and effort, cases are now being charged “as what they are” rather than being charged down because of lack of resources to conduct further investigation – into the prior record of the defendant, for example. For example, no cases to date have been charged down to ‘disorderly conduct’ charges. Finally, the increased resources now allow for JPU attorneys to be present at probation violation hearings, enabling them to advocate for stiffer probation violation penalties. Previously, due to caseloads and lack of specialization within the trial unit, any attorney who was available would attend – usually one who was unfamiliar with the case.
  - (iii) **Case disposition:** Interviewees who were willing to give an opinion felt that cases are being, and would continue to be disposed of more quickly, and that because of the single charging unit, the JPU cases may be resulting in more stringent dispositions (enhanced sentences). All who voiced this opinion, however, stressed that this was purely conjecture at this stage in the implementation of the JPU, noting that few cases have reached disposition. The representative of the bench, however, pointed out that being able to see the same prosecutors prosecuting all the domestic violence cases involving young children enables both prosecutors and judges to follow through on policies regarding the prosecution and disposition of these cases. He also pointed out that cross-deputization of attorneys means that prosecution can be increased on more serious charges, because information-sharing among the judicial team is facilitated.
  - (iv) **Changes in the way victims and witnesses are treated/ changes in the way victims experience the judicial process:** Only those with direct victim contact (i.e. victim advocates) felt they could answer this question; others expressed the hope that because of the change in structure with the JPU, victims would feel more informed about and involved in the judicial process. Those within the county attorney’s office expressed the view that having the resources (i.e. a victim-witness advocate) to contact victims outside the court, meant that victims did not need to be required to present in court in order to state their cases. Some victim advocates expressed concern that there was the potential for unnecessary and potentially unpleasant contact between victims and defendants in the courthouse during settlement conferences, as both may meet on the same floor of the court (unlike other domestic

abuse cases, where court advocates meet with their clients on a different floor than where cases are heard). All advocates interviewed, however, felt that the JPU would be beneficial for their clients, and that earlier victim contact (with the JPU advocate) would only help adult and child victims and witnesses.

(c) Other benefits:

- (i) Communication: A significant benefit highlighted by all those interviewed, regardless of their roles in relation to the JPU, was the fact that there has been a significant increase in communication between agencies with information about domestic violence perpetrators and defendants. Many also felt that this information is now being shared in a more formalized and efficient way – to the benefit of all parties involved in domestic abuse proceedings. For example, because of the added resources that the JPU has brought (attorneys prosecuting fewer cases, on average, than the average city attorney prosecuting misdemeanor domestic abuse cases; and added victim advocacy services) community corrections officers are now always contacted regarding a defendant's prior history or probation record. Corrections officers can give prosecuting attorneys information regarding a defendant's prior history that the Saint Paul police often do not have (for example, details of offenses committed in other police jurisdictions). This information can then enable attorneys to enhance charges where justified and appropriate, hopefully resulting in a more stringent disposition. Added advocacy services, and good communication between the JPU advocate and local victim resource agencies enables faster communication with victims and witnesses. This has already resulted in several cases where information given by the victim to the advocate (that police and attorneys did not previously have) about the charging incident, has enabled attorneys to enhance charges and request stiffer penalties in court.

The police representative interviewed expressed the sense that this increased communication (and fewer perpetrators 'slipping through the cracks' of information barriers) would lead to less police frustration in dealing with repeat domestic violence incidents – those incidents where police are called time and again to the same location for domestic violence incidents where children are involved. "Taking a crack (at these cases) means our work is simpler," he noted. In addition, he noted that police reports are being changed (as a result of the JPU and its referral criteria) to specifically note the presence or absence of children in domestic violence incidents. This by-product of the JPU is beneficial not only to prosecuting attorneys, but is highlighted as an example of how identifying children exposed to violence is the first step towards intervening and offering services. Since the police are almost always the primary responders to such scenes, they are in the best position to be able to identify the youngest victims and witnesses, thereby enabling other systems to intervene and offer help.

Finally, those within the attorneys' offices noted that more frequent and formalized communication between the city and county attorney's offices has allowed for more knowledge to be exchanged on domestic violence cases in general, resulting in a

higher level of cooperation and collaboration. In addition, the dedication of a unit within the county attorney's office to domestic violence has allowed for more specialization leading, it is hoped, to better prosecution of these difficult cases.

- (ii) Tracking of high-risk perpetrators: It was noted that prosecuting all domestic violence cases with young children involved within one unit is facilitating the tracking of high-risk offenders (who previously may have been alternately prosecuted within City or County Attorney's offices). The development of such a database of high-risk offenders may enable those both within and outside the courthouse to help adult and child victims and witnesses.

(d) Potential disadvantages/ unintended consequences or pitfalls:

One advocacy agency expressed concern that the development of a joint prosecution unit to deal specifically with domestic abuse cases involving children might result in more scrutiny of female victims' care of their children (and subsequent reporting of the domestic abuse to Child Protective Services). Despite this concern, the same advocates did state that they had no evidence such a concern would be played out.

Another concern that was expressed by some stakeholders was that the 'promise' of the JPU may not come to fruition if the enhanced charges prosecuted where appropriate by the JPU attorneys do not result in harsher dispositions by judges' rulings.

**Summary of client satisfaction data.** In summary, key stakeholders overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the process of implementation of the Joint Prosecution Unit. Key points highlighted included the advantages of having cross-deputized attorneys who could prosecute both misdemeanors and felonies in the same unit (more efficient), and increased resources (attorneys prosecuting fewer cases, added advocacy services). These key benefits, it was thought, have led to more efficient communication and judicial processing of cases, with hoped-for results being that perpetrators of domestic abuse involving children will be punished appropriately and not be allowed to 'slip through' cracks in key systems.

**JPU clients served: September to December 2000.** As of December 19<sup>th</sup> 2000, the JPU had prosecuted, or was in the process of prosecuting eighty-three cases of domestic abuse involving children. These cases represented 80 different defendants, and 80 different victims. All defendants are males, all adult victims female. (The three 'additional' cases represent repeat domestic abuse incidents involving the 'original' perpetrator and victim.) Prior criminal charges history was known for 58 of the 80 individuals (as of 12/19/00). Of these 58 individuals, 25 (43%) had no known prior history of domestic abuse charges, and 33 (57%) had at least one prior domestic abuse charge. The numbers of prior charges for these 'repeat offenders' ranged from 1 to 20 prior incidents, with a mean of 4 incidents per individual defendant. Prior charges included felonies, misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors.

Of the eighty-three cases prosecuted within the JPU thus far, one case has been dismissed to date, and there have been 35 plea hearings to date. All plea hearings have resulted in 'guilty' pleas, and no case has been "plead down" from one of the final counts. Charges in seven cases

have been enhanced, usually due to more information being gathered on the criminal history of the defendant.

Sixty-nine of the eighty adult female victims represented in the JPU cases to date have biological children living with them. Numbers of children range from 1 to 9, with a mean of 1.48 children per family. All of the victims have been contacted by the victim-witness advocate, either by letter, telephone call or face-to-face meeting (through a home visit, or meeting in the courthouse). Fifty-six victims have been referred for advocacy, counseling and other services, 15 have declined referrals (and a further 9 victims have not yet been offered referrals). Of the 48 victims who have been asked to date whether they are prepared to cooperate with a trial, 69% have agreed to do so, and 31% have declined.

Of the eighty-three cases to date, fourteen (17%) involve children directly as victims. Nine of these fourteen child victims have been referred for counseling and other services by the victim-witness advocate.

## **Appendix C Outline for Victim Follow-Up Interviews**

Victims will be contacted by telephone between three and four months following their initial involvement with the JPU (to be defined as their first contact with the JPU victim/witness advocate). The following ‘script’ should be viewed as an approximation of the way the interview will be conducted – the follow-up interview is designed to be semi-structured (rather than structured), to allow participants to give further information about the judicial process and their experiences with the JPU, should they so desire.

### ***Interview outline:***

“Hello. My name is... I received your name and telephone number from Ben Lauer, who you were in contact with a few months ago. He’s a victim/witness advocate at the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office and he contacted you about the domestic incident you were involved in at around that time.

I’m calling because we’d like to see how women and kids can best be helped by the courts, attorneys and advocates when they are involved in domestic incidents. I’m wondering whether you wouldn’t mind answering a few questions for me, over the phone, about your experience with the courts. Any information that you give me is confidential – nobody but me will be able to identify you based what you tell me. I have five questions, and this call may take up to 10 minutes or so. Do you have some time now?

(If no, “Is there a better time when I might be able to reach you? / Is there a better phone number to reach you at?” If woman declines participation – “thank you for your time, and please feel free to contact myself (phone number) or Ben Lauer at the County Attorney’s office (266 2747) if you have any more questions, or comments”.)

If interviewee agrees... “Thank you for agreeing to participate. I’m not sure if you know that the unit that handled the incident you were involved with is a special unit that has only recently been set up by the city and the county together to handle domestic violence cases like yours, that involve kids and families. It’s called the Joint Prosecution Unit, and though it’s located at the County Attorney’s Office, the attorneys who work in the unit, work for both the City of Saint Paul and the County. I don’t know if you’ve been involved with the courts before as the victim of a domestic incident, but if you have, you’ll probably have worked with different people – either the city attorneys or the county attorneys, depending on how serious the incident was, and you may have found the whole experience different. Do you have any questions about this unit, or about what I’ve said so far?

Just a few questions for you...

1. Have you been involved with court before as a victim of a domestic incident?
  - a. If yes, have you noticed any differences between this time and the last time in the way the court (attorneys, advocates, etc.) has worked with you?

- b. Were there some aspects of this court process that you found to be helpful or useful to you (services you were offered, or information that was given to you by the advocates or the attorneys)? If yes, specify who and what.
  - c. Were there any services, or was there any information that you wish would have been provided by the attorneys or advocates but wasn't (if quizzical, explain what advocates vs. attorneys do)? What were they?
2. Did you feel that the advocates and/or attorneys offered help with family issues? For example, did anybody ask about or offer help or services for your children? (again, if yes, specify).
3. I know how important your kids are to you, and in fact, as I mentioned earlier, one of the main reasons for starting this unit was a concern for kids and families ...How many children do you have? (If none, clarify the relationship of the child witness/victims to the adult victim). Do they live with you most of the time/do you have custody of them? Have you had any concerns about your children in regard to the domestic incident(s)? Have you looked for or been offered any help for them? (If yes, specify).
4. Service utilization – Have you sought out or received any services since your recent involvement with the courts? For example, have you been involved with an advocate since your contact with the unit/ since Ben contacted you? (If yes, how long, intensity of relationship, type of services offered and accepted). Have you or your kids started with any other services since the incident – like counseling, or home-based services.
5. Did you feel that the court process was fair? Could you explain? (If seem to be open and not too defensive - What was your experience of the prosecution process?).
6. Has your experience with the courts, in regards to this domestic violence incident changed anything about your daily life? – for better or worse? For example, has it changed your relationships with your partner or your children. Have you received better or more services since this incident? (If they agree it has changed their lives - How has it changed your life specifically?).

Thanks so much for your help in answering these questions, and for your time – I know how busy you must be. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have anything you'd like to tell me – about this interview, your experiences in court and with the domestic incident, or if you have any more questions. My number is...and I'll also give you the phone number of Ben Lauer – the victim/witness advocate at the Joint Prosecution Unit (651 266 2747).

**APPENDIX D**  
**Questions for Stakeholders – Process Evaluation of the JPU**

Please note that these are interview questions and should serve as an outline for solicited feedback, rather than as strictly delimiting the parameters of information gathered.

1. What is your role within the JPU/ the courts, police department or the county Attorney's Office?
2. Are there any differences between current operations (in regard to the charging, handling, processing and disposition of domestic violence cases involving children) and those operations prior to the implementation of the JPU?
3. If yes to #2, please note whether change has occurred on the following dimensions:
  - i. Do you see any changes in the efficiency with which cases are processed?
  - ii. Any changes in the charging of these cases?
  - iii. Any changes in the actual handling of cases?
  - iv. Any changes in the disposition of cases thus far?
  - v. Any changes in the way victims and witnesses (adult and child) are treated and any changes in the way victims and/or children seem to experience the court process?
4. Could you briefly outline any benefits you see of the JPU (not previously mentioned) to the criminal justice system, and on a broader level to society, or the public at large?
5. Could you briefly outline any disadvantages (or unintended negative consequences) of the JPU, as you see it?
6. Do you have anything to add that I may have missed, regarding the JPU, that could serve as valuable feedback to the members of the JPU or the Ramsey County Attorney's Office?

Thank you for your time!



**APPENDIX E**

**List of agency stakeholder interviewees – Process evaluation of the JPU**

Mike Toronto	Commander, Homicide Unit, Saint Paul Police Department
Beverly Hall	Commander, Sex Crimes and Family Violence Unit, SPPD
Lawrence Cohen	Chief Judge, Ramsey County District Court
J. Thomas Mott	Assistant Chief Judge, Ramsey County District Court
Mimi Wright	Judge, Ramsey County District Court
Paulette K. Flynn	Judge, Ramsey County District Court
Mark Forliti	Supervisor, Domestic Abuse Unit, Ramsey County Corrections
Susan Gaertner	Ramsey County Attorney
Clayton Robinson	Saint Paul City Attorney
Phil Carruthers	Director, Prosecution Division, Ramsey County Attorney's Office
George Stephenson	Deputy City Attorney/Criminal, Saint Paul City Attorney's Office
Mary Biermier	Director, Victim/Witness Svces, Ramsey County Attorney's Office
Al Zdrazil	Assistant Ramsey County Attorney (Lead JPU Attorney)
Ben Lauer	Victim/Witness Advocate, Ramsey Co. Attorney's Office (JPU)
Laura Nespbor	Counseling Supervisor, Community Assistance Program/Wilder Foundation