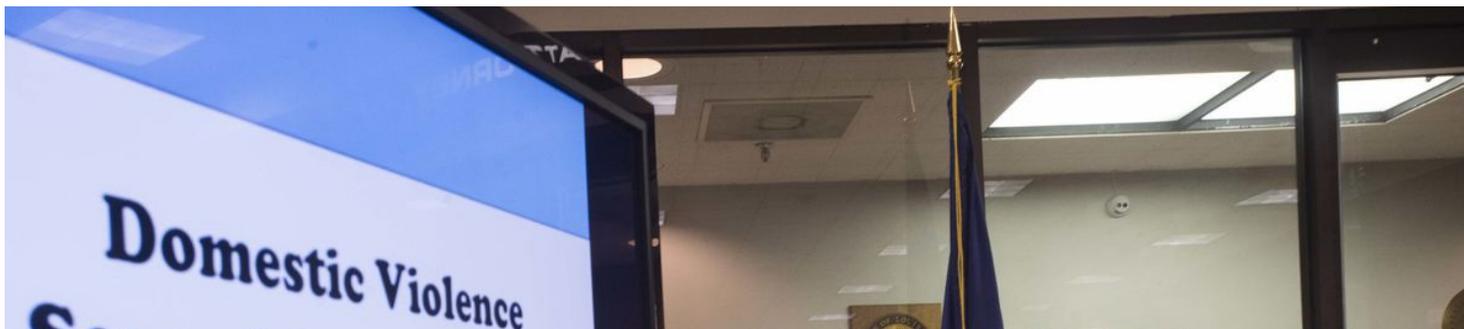


http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/article_7cd12f66-11e4-11e8-8036-7f956aa0d082.html

East Baton Rouge District Attorney: 14 domestic violence incidents in 2017 ended in homicides

BY EMMA DISCHER | EDISCHER@THEADVOCATE.COM FEB 15, 2018 - 11:49 AM





Emma Discher

Domestic violence cost the lives of 14 people and led to more than 5,000 arrests last year in East Baton Rouge Parish, District Attorney Hillar Moore III said Thursday as he presented his second annual report on a problem he says should be preventable.

The number of deadly incidents doubled between 2016 and 2017, accounting for 19 percent of all homicides last year, a year that already held the record for the most murders in the parish.

Domestic violence incidents bookended 2017 with fatalities on New Year's Day and the following New Year's Eve. Asha Davis, 29, was killed on New Year's Day 2017 and her boyfriend, Thailand Brooks, was later arrested in her death. Nearly a year later, Katrice Belezairé was arrested in the stabbing death of her 38-year-old boyfriend, Benjamin McKneel.

Many domestic violence cases involve an escalation of prior incidents, the report notes. In at least 10 of the 14 fatal incidents last year, there were previous reports of domestic violence for the people involved. For instance, Brooks had three previous arrests for domestic abuse battery between 2014 and 2016.

Moore's office keeps a list of frequent violent offenders, which includes people involved in dating and domestic violence. He said that list is regularly circulated to law enforcement and prosecutors.

Not long after Moore finished his presentation Thursday, he tweeted out a USA Today article about 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, who is accused of killing 17 people and wounding many more at a school shooting Wednesday in Florida. The article quotes a former classmate saying Cruz had been abusive to a girlfriend.

“Domestic violence always escalates,” Moore wrote in the tweet.

Moore called domestic violence preventable and urged people who witness signs or incidents to say something, likening those who report cases to ShotSpotter, a technology that picks up the sound of shootings and directs first responders to the location.

“When you don’t have ShotSpotter there, you don’t get to hear those shots when nobody reports,” Moore said. “Same thing with domestic and dating violence. Unless someone actually sees something, oftentimes these go unreported.”

The District Attorney Office’s caseload of domestic violence had dipped in 2016 from previous years with just 1,800 cases, with crimes ranging from misdemeanors to murders. But Moore said Thursday his office usually handles approximately 3,000 domestic violence cases annually.

Of the fourteen fatal encounters in 2017, four of them ended in murder-suicide, Moore said. The 10 other cases all resulted in an arrest.

Two of the 14 killings were committed by women, Moore said. The majority of the cases involved guns, but three of the killings were done by knife and one by arson.

The Baton Rouge Police Department made approximately 4,000 arrests and the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office made approximately 1,000 arrests in domestic violence cases last year, Moore said. Both agencies have detectives who work exclusively on domestic and dating violence incidents, Moore said.

Other arrests were made by Zachary Police Department, Baker Police Department and university police departments, but those numbers were not reflected in the report, meaning the total number of these arrests is even higher parishwide. The incidents include domestic abuse battery, stalking, kidnapping and improper telephone communications.

Moore said he plans to ask legislators to sponsor a bill that would require salon specialists and nail technicians to take an awareness course on domestic violence, in order to increase community awareness.