



TACIR INSIGHT

TENNESSEE ADVISORY COMMISSION ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

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Keeping Domestic Violence Victims Safe with Pretrial GPS Monitoring

Background

Pretrial GPS monitoring is one condition of release that magistrates in Tennessee may impose for domestic violence defendants. Although it is a tool that can help improve victim safety, some experts and researchers in the field of domestic violence question GPS monitoring's effectiveness in keeping victims safe and reducing recidivism during the pretrial period, and funding it is a challenge.

In light of its potential as a tool to improve victim safety in domestic violence cases, the General Assembly passed Public Chapter 827, Acts of 2018, directing TACIR to conduct a study of the effects and implementation of GPS monitoring as a condition of release for defendants accused of stalking, sexual assault, domestic abuse, and violations of orders of protection. The Commission's report explains that because of the unique and complex nature of domestic violence, GPS monitoring is most effective when implemented within a well-coordinated system.

Findings and Recommendations

- Local jurisdictions should consider adopting GPS monitoring as but one component of a larger coordinated community response—including strong interagency partnerships, cooperation and commitment from stakeholders, and services such as lethality assessments, domestic violence high-risk teams, and family safety centers.
- Regardless of whether local governments choose to implement GPS monitoring programs, law enforcement agencies should be encouraged to adopt lethality assessments because of their effectiveness as a tool to identify victims most at risk of serious harm or death and to help prioritize their access to services.
- If the General Assembly appropriates additional funds to the Electronic Monitoring Indigency Fund (EMIF) specifically for real-time GPS monitoring of domestic violence defendants, it should require that local governments drawing money from the fund, at a minimum, adopt a validated lethality assessment tool to both help identify which domestic violence victims are in the greatest danger and immediately connect those victims with services to keep them safe.
- Other local governments adopting pretrial GPS monitoring programs may also choose to prioritize high-risk cases and certain types of offenses, including intimate partner violence, strangulation, stalking, threats involving firearms, or violations of protection orders.