



SCREENING HARM, IDENTIFYING ESCALATING LETHALITY DANGER (SHIELD) FOR VICTIMS ACT

Key Provisions

- Requires the U.S. Attorney General to create a standard tool to identify domestic violence victims at risk of being significantly harmed.
- Requires federal law enforcement officers to receive training on this risk-assessment tool at the **Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)**

Lethality Assessment Programs

A lethality assessment program is a standardized screening tool law enforcement officers use when responding to domestic violence calls to gauge how likely a victim is to be seriously injured or killed by their partner. Officers typically walk through a short questionnaire on the scene, covering factors like prior threats with weapons, strangulation history, escalating violence, or the abuser's access to firearms, and score the responses to flag high-risk cases. When a case scores as high-risk, it triggers an immediate connection and warm handoff to a domestic violence hotline or advocate, often via a phone call made right at the scene, rather than just handing the victim a pamphlet with resources to follow up on later. This allows victims to safely plan with a trained advocate, allowing them to gather their belongings safely, and move to a friend's house, shelter, or connect to a counselor for services and resources.

Background

As already recognized by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), intimate partner violence is a pervasive issue in the United States. And researchers at the NIJ found that the Lethality Assessment Program reduced the severity and frequency of violence survivors experienced. The Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP)s, created by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence in 2003, is a program designed to prevent intimate partner homicides and serious abuse. Studies evaluating victim-focused police interventions like the LAP show a reduction of up to 40% in female intimate partner homicides committed by men. Utah, Florida, Maryland, Kentucky, South Dakota, and Montana already have their own state-wide lethality assessment programs.

The SHIELD for Victims Act enables federal law enforcement officers and advocates to work as equal partners in a more coordinated, communicative, and collaborative way to engage victims who otherwise may not access the life-saving services.