



**Prothonotary
County of Montgomery
Noah Marlier**

**First Deputy
Lauren Tilger-Halbom**

Prothonotary

Montgomery County Courthouse

P.O. Box 311

Norristown, Pennsylvania 19404-0311

Phone: 610-278-3360

Fax: 610-278-5994

www.montcopa.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Prothonotary's Office Still Open to Process Protections from Abuse

As we find ourselves in the middle of the Covid-19 public health emergency, another threat to public health and safety has increased dramatically: domestic violence and abuse. Studies show that shelter-in-place orders and home isolation increase the likelihood of domestic abuse, allowing the perpetrator more control over his or her victim as they are confined together indoors. The current situation, including social distancing, makes it much more difficult for victims to escape their abuser. While the Office of the Prothonotary and the Montgomery County Courthouse consider Protections from Abuse orders to be essential services, many victims are not aware of the help available to them.

The global scope of this domestic abuse crisis is staggering, as *The New York Times* reports in an April 6, 2020 [article](#). In Spain, the domestic violence emergency hotline received 18% more calls in the first two weeks of lockdown than the same period a month prior. France has reported a nationwide increase of about 30% in domestic violence incidents. Similar reports are coming out of other countries, including China, Italy, and Great Britain.

Locally, Montgomery County Detectives reported an 8-9% increase in domestic abuse reports between March 11 and April 12. County police departments reported an average of 40 domestic abuse incidents per day during that same period. An April 3, 2020 [article](#) from *The Guardian* quotes Susan Pearlstein of Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA) who says that it is concerning that both calls to their intake center and calls to their domestic violence hotline have decreased, which, she says, does not suggest that fewer people need their help. Instead, it is more likely that victims either cannot seek help, or they are unaware of the resources available to them. The PLA's intake volume decreased by 54% after March 16.

Similarly, our own office has shown a worrisome decrease in the number of Protection from Abuse Petitions filed during the public health emergency. In January and February of 2020, we processed 128 and 121 PFAs, respectively. That averages out to about 25 PFAs per week in January and 30 per week in February. Between March 1 and March 13, we processed a total of 50 PFAs, or an average of 25 per week. Once the public health emergency began, the number dropped to a total of 39 PFAs processed between March 18 and March 31, or an average of 19 PFAs per week. The numbers continue to drop in

April. The week of April 6-10, we processed only 13 PFAs. The week of April 13, we processed only eight PFAs. That the number continues to decrease is alarming since incidents of domestic abuse are surely rising.

It is vital that Montgomery County residents who are experiencing domestic abuse are informed of their options. Our Norristown office opens every weekday at 9am; PFA petitioners are encouraged to arrive no later than noon to ensure that they are able to be heard before the Court. For more information, please call 610-278-1191. For after-hours assistance, people can call the 24-hour Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-773-2424. If a PFA is needed, they will be directed to their local police station and be referred to the on-call Magisterial District Judge.

We believe that knowing that these resources and essential public services are available can and will have a significant impact in protecting victims of abuse, particularly during these unprecedented times.