



JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF CALIFORNIA

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## FACT SHEET

September 2025

# Violence Against Women Education Project 2024-2025

Domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and human trafficking are critical issues facing tribal, family, criminal, probate, and juvenile courts in California. The Violence Against Women Education Project (VAWEP) is an initiative designed to provide tribal and state courts with information, supplies, technical assistance, educational materials, and programs on the role of the courts in responding to cases involving these issues. VAWEP is a project of the Center for Families, Children & the Courts of the Judicial Council of California. The project is being implemented in collaboration with the Center for Judicial Education and Research and is funded by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES).<sup>1</sup>

### Project Goals

The goal of VAWEP is to provide current education and program support in the areas of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and human trafficking.

VAWEP efforts include:

- Identifying the primary educational and informational needs of the courts;
- Initiating new judicial branch educational programming, including delivering regional training events and enhancing existing programming;
- Developing distance learning opportunities for judicial officers and court staff relating to court procedure and policy;
- Developing and compiling for the courts useful information that relates specifically to California state and tribal law and federal Indian law;

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- Institutionalizing the inclusion of the subject areas in all relevant judicial branch education curricula, programs, and publications;
- Increasing communication among state and tribal courts about best practices and cross jurisdictional collaboration;
- Providing jurisdiction-specific technical assistance;
- Creating educational tools that aid in the administration of justice for self-represented litigants;
- Ensuring that trainings, educational resources, and other forms of assistance are available to tribal judges and tribal courts and their staff on an equal footing with state courts recognizing the different structure of tribal courts;
- Providing resources and technical assistance to tribal courts; and
- Supporting efforts to enhance access to and improve the administration of justice for Native American victims and survivors.

### **Planning Committee**

The project’s planning committee includes representation from tribal courts and tribal justice partners; superior courts; prosecution and defense; and the advocacy community. The planning committee guides the project staff in identifying key areas of focus and developing appropriate educational programming. The committee meets at least once a year in person or by videoconference.

### **Judicial Education**

In California, judicial officers who hear criminal, family, juvenile justice, juvenile dependency, or probate court cases participate in appropriate education on domestic violence issues.<sup>2</sup> Domestic violence content must also be included in certain education programs for new and experienced judicial officers.

VAWEP staff also provide educational programming for various court staff, including mediators, evaluators, self-help center staff, and court clerks.

Below are the educational programs provided during the 2024-2025 grant cycle.

#### **B.E. Witkin Judicial College of California (Jul. 2025)**

Under California Rule of Court, rule 10.462(c)(1)(C), all recently appointed or elected California trial court judges, commissioners, and referees are required to complete the Judicial College within 2 years of taking the oath of office. The college included the following courses in July 2025:

- Immigration Law for State Courts: Judge’s Role in Ensuring Access and Fairness When Handling Immigration Issues
- Domestic Violence: What Everyone New to the Bench Should Know

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<sup>2</sup> Cal. Rules of Court, rule 10.464.

### **Primary Assignment Orientation Courses**

A judge who is new to a particular court assignment or who is changing assignments (from criminal to juvenile law, for example) is required to participate in a week-long program called Primary Assignment Orientation (PAO). Domestic violence issues are consistently covered in these programs, in the following topics:

#### **Family Law PAO (Jan. 2025, Jun. 2025)**

- Domestic Violence Law
- Domestic Violence and Custody
- Firearms Relinquishment
- Domestic Violence Implications

#### **Juvenile Dependency PAO (Jan. 2025, Jun. 2025)**

- Domestic Violence in Dependency Cases
- Effects of Domestic Violence on Children
- Restraining Orders
- Reasonable Efforts

#### **Juvenile Justice PAO (Oct. 2024, Feb. 2025)**

- Mental Health, Trauma, and Domestic Violence: Recommendations for Practice as a Juvenile Justice Court Judge
- Domestic Violence Nuts & Bolts
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC): Identifying Risk and Addressing Trauma
- Restraining Orders

#### **Criminal Law PAO (Oct. 2024, Jun. 2025)**

- Criminal Protective Orders
- Domestic Violence probation requirements and ensuring compliance

### **Experienced Assignment Courses**

Educational programs designed for experienced judicial officers are also supported by VAWEP. The following VAWEP courses were offered during this grant cycle:

#### **“Immigration Issues in Domestic Violence Cases” (Mar 2025)**

This course is essential for all state court judges who handle cases involving noncitizens. Using domestic violence as a case study, participants will explore the ethical implications when immigration issues arise in various court proceedings, including the specific duties and role of the court and best practices for handling immigration issues. Faculty will discuss how and when immigration issues may be relevant in case adjudication and the considerations unique to cases involving noncitizens in the context of domestic violence. The first day of the course will focus

on immigration issues in criminal court, while the second day of the course will focus on immigration issues that arise in family and juvenile court.

**“Ethics and Self-Represented Litigants in Domestic Violence Cases” (May 2025)**

This course was redesigned and is now 2.5 days (formerly 2 days). The course begins with exploring the dynamics of domestic violence and the context framework for assessing and accounting for abuse when making orders. The remainder of the course focuses on judicial ethics issues that arise in domestic violence cases when one or both parties are self-represented, and application of the canons contained in the Code of Judicial Ethics. Access, fairness and ethical issues when conducting hearings, including remote hearings was also discussed, including best practices, cultural responsiveness, and communication skills. The course also includes a practical skills-building exercise in which participants are recorded and given feedback on their demeanor and communication skills.

**“Handling Sexual Assault Cases” (Sep. 2025)**

Sexual assault cases require the judge to be familiar with a unique body of substantive and procedural law that is not necessarily applicable in other criminal cases. The judge must also be aware of and understand the dynamics of sexual assault cases, the needs of the victim and specially mandated accommodations, and myths and misconceptions about sexual assault victims/survivors and offenders. This two-day course emphasizes these key issues and guide judges through managing a sexual assault trial, from arraignment to sentencing and postsentencing procedures. The course also includes a discussion of sex offender characteristics and psychological evaluations.

**Judicial Institutes**

Judicial Institutes programs for judicial officers provide tailored information to targeted audiences. During this grant year, VAWEP courses included an in-person Domestic Violence Judicial Institute.

**Cow County Judge Institute (Jun. 2025)**

This institute is designed to meet the needs of new and experienced judges from rural or small courts who may handle multiple calendar types. The institute includes substantive law courses in multiple disciplines and discussion forums regarding case and court management. Sessions included:

- Recent Developments in Domestic Violence
- Firearms Relinquishment

**Criminal Law Institute (Dec. 2024)**

The institute is designed to meet the needs of those experienced in the criminal law assignment as well as those new to a criminal law assignment. This year, VAWEP funded a session on technology-enabled abuse.

**Family Law Institute (Apr. 2025)**

The 2024 Family Law Institute incorporates substantive law, procedural law, best judicial practices, and innovations in the family courtroom. This year, VAWEP funded a session on “The Intersection of Domestic Violence and Custody and Visitation.”

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### **Multidisciplinary and Court Staff Training**

#### **Family Court Services (FCS), Institute for New Court Professionals (Oct. 2024)**

This multiday training for new family law mediators and child custody recommending counselors includes an overview of domestic violence laws and policies. This program was provided remotely and required participants to practice mediation techniques. This year’s session included “Domestic Violence Legal Update.”

#### **Family Court Services Directors Symposium (Sept. 2025)**

This one-day event was hosted in person and focused on the SAFeR model, an approach to screen, assess and respond to allegations of abuse and domestic violence.

### **Training and Technical Assistance**

#### **Domestic Violence Safety Partnership**

The Domestic Violence Safety Partnership (DVSP) provides local technical assistance to applicant courts that have a need for local training, or improving domestic violence policies or services. VAWEP funds are used to support training or technical assistance that is tailored to local needs.

#### **Court Forms Program**

VAWEP staff provides ongoing technical support to trial courts that use document assembly software programs to help self-represented litigants with domestic violence restraining order cases. One such program, called HotDocs, is a guided online interview that was developed by the Judicial Council and is currently maintained by VAWEP staff. HotDocs is currently being used by more than 25 courts and service providers. A “live chat” feature is available to assist users in navigating the program.

### **Publications and Other Resources**

VAWEP staff reviews various bench guides, pamphlets, and other publications to determine whether updates are required during the grant period. Below are the current publication updates:

- Criminal Protective Orders Bench Card
- Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) Bench Card
- Discovery, Admissibility, and Confidentiality of Immigration Information Checklist
- Judge’s Role Related to Immigration Remedies Arising from Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking
- Court Response to U Visa and T Visa Certification Requests (Toolkit)
- Domestic Violence Selected Case Summaries and Statutes (Criminal, Family, and Dependency)
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Bench Card: “Harm Reduction and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Bench Cards”

- California Judges Benchbook: Domestic Violence Cases in Criminal Court (CEB, 2024 update)

### **Tribal-State Activities**

The VAWEP tribal team focuses on issues affecting tribal communities and provides resources to state and tribal courts.

This grant year, the following tribal educational courses were held:

- “Bay Area ICWA Symposium“: An all-day event to incorporate Domestic Violence related crossover issues to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), such as Missing & Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) issues. (Apr. 2025)
- “Understanding the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of LGBTQIA2S+: How Providers Can Collaborate to Build Inclusive Services & Spaces” CSEC Action Team Quarterly Meeting-Hybrid (Jun. 2025)
- “Improving Access to Justice Through Recognition & Enforcement of Tribal Court Order” (Sep. 2025)

### **Training and Technical Assistance**

The STEPS (State-Tribal Education, Partnerships, and Services) program provides local educational and technical assistance to tribal courts and state courts on issues relating to domestic violence and tribal communities. Judges can request a tailored educational event to meet local needs or request technical assistance. Project staff also attend various tribal resource fairs to build community and share information and court resources.

During this grant period, project staff:

- Provided technical assistance on California Courts Protective Order Registry (CCPOR).
- Provided technical assistance on recognition and enforcement of tribal court protective orders.
- Provided funding for tribal court personnel to attend “Protecting Children & Families in Tribal Courts: A Multi-Disciplinary Training” (December 2024).

Ongoing projects include:

- Tribal Court–State Court Joint Jurisdiction Toolkit;
- Bench cards and educational tools;
- Local tribal-state agreements to improve recognition of tribal protective orders; and
- Jurisdictional tools for law enforcement and judges.

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**Planning Committee (roster will be updated)**