



## **Summit County Domestic Relations Court, Victim Assistance Program Partner to Improve Victim Services**

(Summit County, Ohio) — The Summit County Domestic Relations Court and Victim Assistance Program of Summit County are working together to better serve victims of Domestic Violence and Dating Violence by hiring a part-time magistrate, adding three full-time on-site advocates to individuals experiencing a victimization, and dedicating a space in the courthouse for children whose parent or guardian are seeking a civil protection order.

The Victim Assistance Program of Summit County is expanding its fifty-year-old Advocacy Program with the allocation of four offices on-site in the Domestic Relations Court, courtesy of Administrative Judge Katarina Cook. . The three full-time on-site advocates are generously funded by the City of Akron's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Additionally, the Summit County Domestic Relations Court has expanded its Domestic Violence and Dating Violence Civil Protection Order docket capacity by adding a part-time Magistrate Position, made possible by grant funding awarded by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

Victim Advocates are assisting civil protection order petitioners from an office inside of the Domestic Relations Courthouse, and will be managing the *Children Who Witness Violence Program Drop-In Center* on the third floor – with plans to open by September 1<sup>st</sup>. The children's' drop-in center is designed to support some of the most vulnerable persons in Summit County: those who face a childcare barrier when seeking a civil protection order. Previously, Civil Protection Order petitioners with children present had to secure outside childcare before they could have their *ex parte* hearing. The program will empower petitioners who face a childcare barrier to have a safe space for their child(ren) while seeking a civil protection order from the court and receiving support from trained Victim Advocates.

For the first time in its history, the Summit Domestic Relations Court has a magistrate dedicated to hearing only domestic violence and dating violence civil protection order cases. The magistrate will hear cases sixteen hours per week, primarily on Tuesdays and Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Civil protection order cases will continue to be heard by all magistrates on a rotating basis, and the addition of a part-time magistrate position will expand the court's capacity to hear and rule on civil protection order cases more efficiently.

The need for advocacy cannot be overstressed in Summit County, and through this collaboration, the Summit County Domestic Relations Court and Victim Assistance Program of Summit County are committed to giving victims of domestic violence and dating violence the support they deserve at every step of the legal process.

**If you or someone you know is in need of crisis intervention, safety planning, or support call *the Victim Assistance Program of Summit County's 24-hour hotline at (330) 376-0040. The Summit County Courthouse accepts civil protection order filings from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.***