



San Francisco Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVRT)
Pilot Report
May, 2023

Executive Summary

The Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVDRT) Process and Methodology

This Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVDRT) Pilot was jointly created by the San Francisco District Attorney's Office (SFDA) and the Department on the Status of Women of the City and County of San Francisco (DOSW) pursuant to the provisions of California Penal Code 11163.3.¹ The City and County of San Francisco have a long-established commitment to reviewing domestic violence-related fatalities, to strengthen system policies and procedures and identify prevention strategies to reduce future incidents of domestic violence-related injuries and deaths. San Francisco has an active Family Violence Council that addresses systems response to domestic violence but has not had staffing for a dedicated Death Review Team. The development of a Domestic Violence Death Review Team is a recurring recommendation from the Family Violence Council. In 2018 CCSF was able to secure additional resources to reintroduce a DVDRT in the form of a pilot. The SFDA and DOSW began by reviewing a prior protocol for domestic violence, child and elder death case reviews conducted by system partners.

Prior DVDRT efforts were co-chaired by the San Francisco District Attorney's Office and the Cooperative Restraining Order Clinic (CROC), with the Department on the Status of Women providing staffing and coordination. This prior experience laid a strong foundation for coordinating the relaunch named the DVDRT Pilot. The SFDA and DOSW engaged the Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School (Quattrone Center or QC) to assist in coordinating and moderating the DVDRT Pilot.² The Quattrone Center is a national thought leader in sentinel event reviews in criminal justice and has assisted jurisdictions across the country in the conduct of such reviews in a variety of different contexts within the criminal justice system.

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² This research was supported by Grant No. 2017-MU-MU-K021 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Principal participants in the DVDRT Pilot are:

- The San Francisco District Attorney's Office
- The Department on the Status of Women
- The San Francisco Police Department
- The San Francisco Medical Examiner's Office
- The San Francisco Department of Emergency Management
- The San Francisco Sheriff's Department
- Cooperative Restraining Order Clinic (CROC)
- The Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice (moderator)

In addition, the DVDRT included community-based domestic violence advocates and professionals ("Advocates") to provide additional expertise on domestic violence indicators, responses, and support and to assist the DVDRT in identifying factors that may contribute to domestic violence-related fatalities, as well as helping to design recommendations for systemic change that have the potential to prevent future such injuries or fatalities.

Incident Reviewed

The Victim was murdered in her apartment by her former boyfriend (Assailant) in the early morning hours of October 10, 2014. In his fourth visit to the apartment that night, Assailant shot Victim, then himself, killing them both. The murder occurred after multiple calls to 911 by the Victim and several of her roommates, and after three (3) visits to the scene by members of the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), including a visit where the Assailant was arrested for being drunk in public and taken to the City Jail for a period of time. The DVDRT decided to review this event in an effort to understand the various factors that came together to enable this tragedy, and in so doing to design modifications to the City's response to domestic violence incidents that will lead to better outcomes for all involved.

The DVDRT carefully analyzed the events of the night of October 9, 2014, to understand the various factors that led to this tragic outcome, and consider how a safer outcome might have been achieved.

This tragedy illustrates a common challenge in helping SFPD officers respond effectively to domestic violence calls: providing responding officers with all of the information that might help the officers diagnose the risk that a domestic dispute could escalate to lethality. The DVDRT team focused on the following aspects of the event to identify contributing factors and recommendations for system changes:

1. *Improving computer-aided dispatch (CAD) systems to provide greater awareness to SFPD officers of prior incidents of violence between Assailant and Victim.*

The mobile computers and Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems used by SFPD at the time (and to some extent, still in effect today) did not automatically provide the complete history of violence between Victim and Assailant to the responding SFPD officers. It is important for responding officers to know as much as possible about previous violent incidents between the parties so that they can evaluate and navigate the situation once they arrive on the scene. A CAD system that automatically provides all prior DV-related charges against a person, as well as the ability to see any prior calls for emergency service at a specific address, including notes made by prior responding officers without requiring an additional search by a responding police officer would help provide this necessary context about the relationship and assist police in their assessment of immediate risk.

2. *Allegation of poisoning and real-time assistance for SFPD officers on scene evaluating*

Any allegation of potentially lethal harm, such as the allegation of poisoning made to an SFPD officer by one of Victim's roommates, should be taken seriously by responding officers, even if it stands in apparent contrast to the emotional state of the Assailant. All officers should be trained to listen for allegations of poisoning and to identify them as potential red flags for lethal violent behavior.

3. *Broad interaction/information gathering by SFPD from roommates or other potential witnesses*

While understanding that not everyone welcomes speaking to the police, SFPD officers should make every effort to gather details and context of domestic violence situations to enable the most appropriate plan for the future safety of all involved.

4. *Ability of SFPD to enforce physical separation despite residency of Assailant as a matter of law*

SFPD officers cannot impose any limitations or sanctions against individuals that are not linked to specific, provable violations of the law. Several facts limited the custodial options available to SFPD officers who responded to Victim's apartment on the night of October 9, including:

- There was no assertion on the night in question that Assailant had physically assaulted or even threatened Victim at any time prior to the murder.
- Officers saw no evidence of any attempt by Assailant to force entry into the apartment.
- Assailant's driver's license listed Victim's address as his address, preventing an arrest for trespassing or some other related violation.

Several DVDRT team members suggested allowing police and courts to look beyond the address listed on a drivers' license and enabling officers to ensure a physical separation between people where physical violence has occurred or is deemed imminent based on prior history.

5. *Custodial treatment of intoxicated individuals*

At the second call for assistance, SFPD officers arrested and charged Assailant for being inebriated in a public place. This succeeded in providing space and an opportunity for de-escalation. Ensuring that victims understand the limits of such an arrest and providing victims with information and support to quickly create the safest possible environment for victims, is essential. Since this event, SPD has updated its procedures, and now has a Special Victims Unit Referral Card as a “leave behind” for victims. This information could also be provided by a domestic violence safety advocate who responded to the call along with SFPD officers (or perhaps even in lieu of an armed police response.)

6. *Real-time assistance for SFPD from domestic violence prevention advocates*

SFPD officers responding to domestic violence calls are essentially asked to be experts in domestic violence, psychology, poison control, and several other discrete disciplines in addition to interpreting and enforcing the law based on imperfect and dynamic facts. Supporting not only officers, but also 911 call-takers and dispatchers with real-time access to experts in these, and potentially other fields, would greatly assist them in accurately assessing and de-escalating situations. This information could be provided by domestic violence experts who can co-monitor calls and discuss the type of needed response, and/or from checklists of questions designed to identify key information on the call. These experts could be located in the Department of Emergency Management and the 911 call center, to allow advocates to hear from (and potentially engage with) callers to 911 who are reporting domestic violence, and to communicate directly with responding officers. While SFPD would still be the point of contact with the caller at the scene, the DV advocate at the call center could help set the appropriate mindset for the officer while the officer is en route to the scene, given the officer specific factors to consider or look for upon his/her arrival on the scene, and would continue to be available to the officer as additional information is gathered at the scene.

7. *Providing closure/well-being assistance to 911 call-takers and dispatchers*

An area discussed by the DVDRT unrelated to the specific events on October 9 but important enough to mention for further investigation by SFPD and the DEM was the emotional toll of DV and other emergency calls on DEM call takers and dispatchers. Providing necessary emotional and well-being support to these first responders is a vital and important service that would be supported by all DVDRT members.

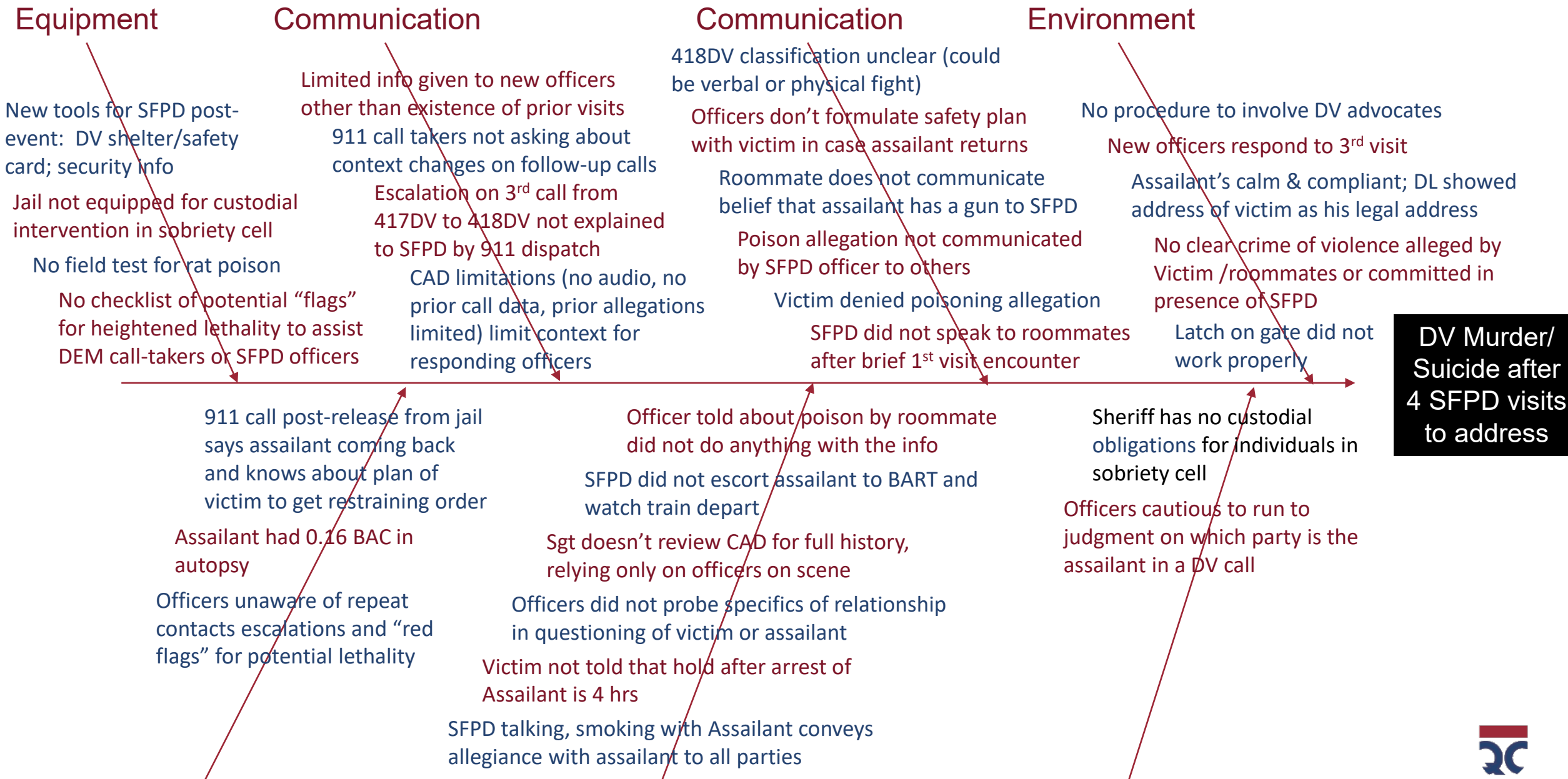
8. *Availability/use of body-worn video (BWV) cameras*

The ability to have BWV from an office reviewable in real time by other officers or domestic violence safety advocates would allow for even greater insight and assistance provided to the officer as that officer assists in a safe resolution of the situation.

9. *SFPD's third response to Victim's address; efficient and thorough transfer of information to later-responding officers*

One of the warning signs for lethality noted by the DVDRT was the simple fact of the repeated visits to the apartment by Assailant despite the continued presence of SFPD. The officers who had responded to the first two encounters were unavailable when Assailant returned to the apartment after Assailant's release from SF Jail. The officers that did respond lacked context from the prior two interactions that might have guided them differently. Again, improvements in CAD and mobile technology for SFPD could improve this.

EVENT REVIEW “FISHBONE” DIAGRAM: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS



**DV Murder/
Suicide after
4 SFPD visits
to address**



DVDRT Recommendations

The Contributing Factors identified by the DVDRT led to sixteen (16) recommendations to SFPD and the City of San Francisco designed to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

SFPD and the City of San Francisco should:

Recommendation Number	Recommendation	Contributing Factor Addressed
1.	<p>Ensure that DEM professionals who handle calls for service to San Francisco’s 911 hotline have real-time access at all times to experts in the management of domestic violence situations. These experts should assist call takers in, among other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Coding calls for emergency service related to domestic violence b. Identifying and managing the risk of violence in each situation, including across the context of multiple calls for service from the same individual or at the same location; and c. Collecting and providing all relevant information to SFPD officers dispatched to the scene, to facilitate peaceful and appropriate resolutions of the emergency situation 	1, 3 – 5, 12, 14
2.	<p>Provide victims’ advocates who can accompany SFPD to domestic violence calls for emergency services. Advocates should be available upon officer request but should be required in situations where a single address has been the source of more than one (1) call for emergency services in a 48-hour period. Services that the advocates provide to SFPD and victims of domestic violence might include, but need not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assessments about the risk of future violence/lethality b. Assessments of the physical security of the victim’s home, along with recommendations for improving the security and a process to inform property owners/landlords of identified security risks to occupants c. Provision of a physical (body and environment) security checklist for victims 	1, 11, 13, 15-16, 20 – 23,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Creation of a plan to ensure the immediate and short-term physical safety of victims of domestic violence, focusing on protection, not disempowerment e. The ability to refer the victim to a shelter in real time, 24/7/365 f. Assistance in transportation to a shelter; and g. Additional information set forth in the SFPD referral card 	
3.	SFPD should memorialize observed security risks at locations where they are called for domestic violence using, among other tools, the SF Safe home assessment and the Cal VCB home security improvements	
4.	Landlords should receive training on minimum levels of security for their propert(ies) and a checklist of items prior to obtaining a rental license	22
5.	<p>The City and County of San Francisco should provide SFPD officers with tools other than arrest to create separation and space between a potential or actual DV victim and the assailant, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Neighborhood Watch/SFSafe information b. Providing victims of domestic violence with information regarding emergency registration c. Assisting victims of domestic violence in identifying and traveling to a shelter that can provide immediate and overnight assistance and protection to the victim d. Providing a “Marsy’s card” DV referral card e. Allowing SFPD officers to differentiate between the address on someone’s driver’s license and where they are actually living in terms of interpreting breaking & entering or other trespass violations 	34
6.	The Department of Emergency Management (DEM) and SFPD should prioritize and/or expedite SFPD responses to repeated	

	allegations of domestic violence from the same address. SFPD should instruct DEM, and DEM should flag the address as a “Hazard Premise” upon the receipt of a 2 nd call from the same address in 24-hour period	
7.	SFPD officers who respond to requests for emergency services in domestic violence cases should proactively seek to interview any and all bystanders, roommates, neighbors, and other individuals who may have observed the incident(s) or who may have background knowledge about the situation that provides useful context for navigating the situation in the short term and beyond. This includes seeking to interview other roommates or residents in an apartment or residence when there is a civil standby (taking into account SFPD policy on arrests when children are present)	8 - 10
8.	When responding to DV calls for emergency services, SFPD officers should always attempt to question as many people as possible to understand the dynamics of the situation with as much context as is practicable, while understanding that witnesses or other residents are not required to provide any information.	15
9.	<p>SFPD officers should have immediate access to the audio of the current 911 call to which officers are responding, as well as to prior calls from the same individual or from the same address. This access should be provided to the officers in real time, and not later than their arrival at the scene.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. DEM 911 hotline call takers should have the discretion and ability to provide information directly to responding officers rather than sending audio of calls directly to SFPD officers. b. The CAD system used by DEM and SFPD officers should provide SFPD officers with the ability to access video and/or audio recordings of prior calls for emergency service from the same address, not just their existence or coding 	

	<p>c. The CAD system should allow SFPD officers responding to domestic violence calls for assistance to compare the statements of individuals at the scene with statements that were made to the 911 call taker.</p>	
10.	<p>In situations where SFPD officers are responding to a call for service related to domestic violence and other SFPD officers have responded to similar calls for service in the prior 48 hours, SFPD should improve the ability of its responding officers to speak directly to the prior responding officers, and provide the responding officers real-time, mobile access to reports filed by the prior responding officers.</p>	
11.	<p>The City of San Francisco should fund and accelerate purchase and implementation of an upgraded Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system that can, at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide officers in real time with the audio, or at a minimum a readable transcript, of any prior 911 call made to the Department of Emergency Management and b. Provide officers in real time with prior allegations of domestic violence made to the SFPD against any individual. Such information should be capable of delivery to an officer’s mobile phone upon request. 	2, 32
12.	<p>DEM 911 call-takers should receive training at the time of their hiring that is refreshed at least every other year on domestic violence-specific psychology of assailants and victims, as well as a set of questions or checklist for the identification of “flags” that will assist call-takers in the ability to evaluate the risk of future violence and/or lethality in a given request for emergency services related to domestic violence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The training should include ways to evaluate/spot avoidance or minimization behaviors from victims of domestic violence 	

	<p>b. The DEM should provide call takers with DV-specific call guide(s) to assist in gathering necessary data to help SFPD and victim’s advocates who respond to a DV call</p>	
13.	<p>At the time of hiring and not less frequently than every other year thereafter, DEM should ensure that its call-takers and dispatchers receive training on vicarious trauma and stewardship and access to appropriate clinical resources to address the risks of vicarious or secondary trauma on these individuals. SFPD and DEM should also discuss and decide whether, when and how to provide information about the ultimate resolution of 911 calls to call-takers and dispatchers, who typically hear only about the request for emergency services and do not know how the events are resolved</p>	
14.	<p>Officers need to build time into DV calls to be thorough in their reporting of data from the individuals interviewed to one another, and to supervisors</p>	
15.	<p>Any time an allegation is made that one person has tried to poison another in a domestic violence call:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The SFPD officer who receives the allegation should contact Poison Control for advice or data that might allow the officer to prove or disprove the allegation; and b. The officer should immediately escalate the allegation to a supervisor to ensure that it is factored into an appropriate SFPD response. <p>These actions should be taken even if the allegation is denied by either the alleged poisoner or the alleged target of the poisoning.</p>	6, 7
16.	<p>The City and County of San Francisco should expand the number of beds providing triage shelter to victims of domestic violence and should provide a free, live 24-hour resource that can connect victims of domestic violence to shelter services.</p>	34