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Focus on domestic violence protection

Abuse victims' slayings spur inquiry, judge says

By Liam Ford
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A specially appointed panel will examine whether Cook County's Domestic Violence Court is adequately protecting victims from abuse, the county's chief judge, Timothy C. Evans, said Thursday.

Evans' decision to order the inquiry follows two high-profile killings this spring involving women who sought protection from the court.

Evans said he has been considering a full review of the court's operations since the \$62 million courthouse at 555 W. Harrison St. opened in 2005, but said the recent slayings gave the issue renewed urgency.

"We're still seeing ... people get hurt and others get killed," he said.

On March 7, Cindy Bischof, 43, of Arlington Heights, was killed by her ex-boyfriend Michael Giroux as she left the real estate office in Elmhurst where she worked.

A month later, Mersaides McCauley, 22, of Chicago, was killed by Glenford Martinez, 35, her ex-boyfriend.

Both women had orders of protection against the men, who killed themselves after fatally wounding their victims.

Since the two slayings, the state has reformed how it handles parolees charged with domestic violence crimes. A new state law will allow judges to order anyone who violates an order of protection to be tracked by satellite.

Evans said that during the next several months the 14-member panel will examine the operation of the main Domestic Violence Court as well as satellite courts in each of the county's five suburban district courthouses. It will be led by Domestic Relations Division Judge Grace Dickler, a 20-year veteran.

Other members of the panel will include academic experts on domestic violence, the head of public affairs for the Cook County state's attorney's office, the head of adult probation for Cook County, and several domestic violence activists.

Details of how the group will conduct its inquiry have yet to be determined. But the members will examine whether Cook County should emulate other court systems throughout the country, Evans said.

"We're going to do everything we can do ... to have a safer county here," Evans said.

One committee member said those who work closely with women seeking help from the court welcome a closer examination.

"It's great that this is going to happen," said Dawn Dalton, executive director of the Chicago Battered Women's Network. "It's something that [the network] has been advocating for 3 ½ years."