

Chatham County District Attorney Meg Heap was first elected in 2013, and has dealt with a variety of challenges in the Greater Savannah from gang violence to now a vexing issue of domestic violence. In fact, the fatalities from gang violence have declined in the past three years (murders down by nearly a half), due to special measures instituted by DA Heap. Yet, the incidence of domestic violence has actually increased, because some of the incipient causes of violence got transformed back to broken homes.

In solving some of the gang violence problems, it became clear through Project Intercept, that truancy investigations from teacher interviews in problem schools were an early sign of domestic problems. Half of the homeless women and children are on the street because of domestic violence. The effect on children can be permanently devastating. In Savannah, there are over 3,000 Police Department calls a year regarding domestic disturbance, and almost 600 Domestic Violence Battery charges, and an average of six homicides a year over the past five years. (See chart below on the potential costs of a homicide from domestic violence.) No wonder Savannah's Safe Shelter is so crucial.

But there are problems preventing women from getting the truth out. Often it takes meeting with nine different agencies that have some jurisdiction on the cases, such as Police, Legal Aid, Social Services, Safe Shelter, Child Support, etc. This bureaucracy needs to be streamlined, and San Diego has designed a remedy to this problem.

### San Diego Project

San Diego began a program by having all such agency representatives appear at a single location to coordinate the information at an early stage convenient to the victim. This procedure has cut down the number of homicides drastically in San Diego, from 30 a year down to 3!

They did this by speeding up the prosecution of offenders. Too often there are delays that allow perpetrators to line up "dropped charges" affidavits by victims. Many times those affidavits are fraudulent obtained or even forged by defense attorneys for the perpetrators.

### Q&A Session

1. Is violence from illegal aliens a problem in Savannah now?

There is some evidence that crimes are being committed by those on the list for ICE detention, but not a problem of MS13 gangs.

2. Is human trafficking a problem here in Savannah?

Not especially large, but it does exist. It is particularly hard to pursue criminal charges because the girl victims are reluctant to admit they have been trafficked, until they have been through extensive counseling.

3. Are there ways this community can help in the DA pursuing her strategy of combatting crime?

There may well be some funding needs after the goal of a special building is purchased to coordinate domestic violence investigations. More will be realized on that progress this April.

4. Are there problems with domestic violence protective orders that expire?

More vigilance is needed on the victims disclosing resumed verbal threats so as to continue the protective orders.

5. Are there still problems with too lenient Parole Boards releasing still violent criminals who repeat their crimes?

This is a continuing problem, as evidence of felonious behavior in prison is somehow not admissible or obtainable, under privacy contentions. Many of the too early released criminals would not have been let out if those behaviors were known to the DAs who could have pled the case better on not allowing early release.



### Cost of One Domestic Violence Murder

	<b>Cost</b>
Four police responses	\$582
Two temporary restraining orders	400
180 day jail term	9,292
Two years probation	4,104
One emergency room visit	855
Two weeks in DV Shelter	2,094
One week in shelter (x3)	4,200
One year in foster care (x3)	18,756
Coroner's autopsies (2)	5,500
Court prosecution	1,500,000
State prison entence (two life terms)	1,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,555,783</b>







