



Law intended to protect teenagers in dangerous relationships being used more broadly, Cuyahoga County records show

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By

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- In Cuyahoga County, more than 50 people asked judges to protect them from juveniles in the first full year a **state law allowed for the new orders**.

However, only a handful of the requests heard by juvenile court judges involved teens in dangerous dating relationships -- the people targeted by those who pushed the law.

Of the 54 petitions for protection filed with the juvenile court through mid-December, 22 were granted.

The requests were made for an array of reasons. Some people asked that teen vandals be ordered to stay away from their homes. Some family members asked that the judges grant the orders to keep violent children or stepchildren from harming them. Others involved violent fights, harassment or threats between schoolmates.

The momentum for a law that would allow protection orders against juveniles was jump-started by several cases in which teens were maimed or killed by former boyfriends, including the case of Cleveland's **Johanna Orozco**, who was shot in the face in 2007.

Her former boyfriend, Juan Ruiz, had been released from juvenile detention after Orozco reported that he had raped her at knifepoint.



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Joshua Gunter, Plain Dealer file photo

Johanna Orozco, who was shot in the face in 2007, speaks to teens across the country about her ordeal.

A judge told Ruiz to stay away from Orozco, but he continued to follow her. She called the police, but their powers to arrest him were limited because the judge's order wasn't entered into the police communications system.

Orozco made several trips to Columbus over two years to testify and support the legislation and was there when the bill was signed into law, alongside another law that calls for teen dating violence education in classrooms across the state.

She speaks to teens across the country about her ordeal.

One of the compromises that allowed the law to be passed was removing the phrase "dating" from the bill in the context of dating violence because some of the lawmakers were concerned about how dating would be defined or how such a relationship would be proven in court.

That deletion left a law that was so broad that anyone who feels fear from a juvenile can ask for a protection order, said Tim Boehnlein, training director for the Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center in Cleveland.

"Our hope was so different than the reality of what occurred," Boehnlein said. "Our hope was that it was intended to be in response to Johanna and Shynerra [a teen who was killed] and all the other girls who have been hurt."

The bill bears the name of Shynerra Grant, a Toledo-area teen who was killed by an ex-boyfriend.

The law allows for the juvenile protection orders that are entered into a police communications system. Juveniles can be arrested if they violated the order and can be charged with delinquency.

Boehnlein said the law probably will have to be tweaked. Alexandria Ruden, a Legal Aid Society lawyer and expert in domestic-violence law, said it could take years for the law to be updated, either through court rulings or additional legislation.

Ruden said the same thing happened when the state's first domestic violence laws were passed in the late 1970s.

However, a companion bill passed simultaneously required all school districts to begin educating students on the danger of teen dating violence.

An appeals court has already invalidated one of the Cuyahoga County juvenile protection orders. Judges from the 8th Ohio District Court of Appeals decided in November that an order granted in a case in which two boys got into a fight on a school bus didn't meet the standards of the law that required fear of future danger.

In its opinion, the court discussed that the law was intended to address dating violence -- not fights between schoolmates.

The Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center has been working to educate judges, magistrates and other court staff to recognize the dynamics of teen dating violence, Boehnlein said.

Specifically, teen dating violence is different from violence between adults because it is less documented and there are often no criminal charges, Boehnlein said.

The center has an advocate in the court who can walk teens and their parents or guardians through the protection order process. It also runs teen dating violence support groups.

"We want to be out there educating parents and teens about what it is and how it is available to them," Boehnlein said.

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