



## PROTECTION ORDERS

NATIONAL CENTER ON PROTECTION  
ORDERS AND FULL FAITH & CREDIT

# Facilitating Enforcement of Protection Orders – Registration of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Protection Orders

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Implications for Advocates

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# Registration of Protection Orders

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**Navigating the process of obtaining a protection order and ensuring its enforcement across jurisdictional boundaries can be overwhelming for survivors. This process is where an advocate's knowledge, with their deep understanding of legal processes as well as safety considerations, becomes crucial. Advocates are well-positioned to offer meaningful guidance to survivors while working with law enforcement, prosecutors, and the courts to ensure an effective system response.**

The full faith and credit provision of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), 18 U.S.C. § 2265, states that a valid protection order issued in one jurisdiction (state, Tribe, or U.S. territory) must be enforced in any other jurisdiction in the United States. Registration or filing of a protection order in the enforcing jurisdiction cannot be a condition of enforcement.<sup>1</sup> This means that courts and law enforcement must enforce protection orders from other states, Tribes, and U.S. territories without requiring the petitioner to register the order. Most states have enacted laws requiring the enforcement of out-of-state protection orders.<sup>2</sup>

Although registration is optional, all but three jurisdictions have enacted statutory provisions to register or file an order from another jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, several jurisdictions require a registered protection order to be entered into their state database or registry and uploaded into the national federal protection order registry, also known as the National Crime Information Center Protection Order File (NCIC POF).<sup>4</sup>

## Protection Order Registries/Databases

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Protection order registries play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of survivors of domestic violence by facilitating the enforcement of protection orders. Filing or registering a protection order from another jurisdiction may help facilitate enforcement. If the order is entered in the enforcing jurisdiction's registry, it may be available to law enforcement officers even if the survivor does not have a paper copy. It may also be used to verify an order that does not appear valid on its face. Furthermore, when a law enforcement officer looks at a protection order from another state, Tribe, or territory, it will likely look different than their own protection order forms. If the order is in their protection order database, it will help the officer identify key provisions of the order, like they would if the order were issued by their own jurisdiction.

# FAQ

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## What is the process for registration?

Generally, to register a protection order issued by one jurisdiction in another jurisdiction, the survivor will need to provide a certified copy of the order to the clerk of the court within the jurisdiction. Most states require an affidavit by the protected individual stating that, to the best of the protected individual's knowledge, the order is currently in effect and has not been vacated or modified.<sup>5</sup> The clerk will then upload the protection order to the state or local database or registry.

## Is there a cost for registering or filing an order?

No. Registration of a protection order is free of charge because VAWA provides that the petitioner should not bear the costs for registering a protection order.<sup>6</sup>

## What is the best practice for registering an order issued in another language?

Survivors with a valid order issued in a language other than English may seek to register the order in another jurisdiction. The best practice would be to assist the survivor in obtaining an English-translated copy of the order when the court issues it. However, if the survivor does not have a translated copy of the order, the clerk's office in the registering jurisdiction should work with the issuing authority to verify and translate the order before registration.

## What is a “certified” copy of a protection order?

A certified copy of a protection order generally contains a stamp, seal, or signature of the issuing judge or clerk of the court and a notation that the copy is an authentic duplicate of the court's original order. VAWA does not require an order of protection to be “certified” to be entitled to enforcement across state, territorial, or Tribal lines. Nonetheless, jurisdictions have their statutory requirements when registering a protection order in their jurisdiction.

## Is a certified copy required for registration?

It depends on the jurisdiction. Currently, thirty-eight states and three U.S. territories have statutory provisions that require a certified copy to be produced to enroll the order into the registry. States vary in their approaches to accepting uncertified copies of protection orders. In some states, if the protected individual does not present a certified copy, the order can still be registered if it is supported by an affidavit from someone with personal knowledge of the order, subject to penalties for perjury.<sup>7</sup>

# How can registration of a protection order assist in preventing the respondent from purchasing firearms?

If the new jurisdiction uploads the protection order information into the NCIC POF, it may also prevent the respondent from purchasing firearms. In general, it is illegal for someone to possess or purchase a firearm if they are subject to a protection order as defined by federal law.<sup>8</sup> If the protection order information is entered into NCIC POF, it will appear as a flag in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) if the respondent undergoes a background check in the course of attempting to purchase a firearm.<sup>9</sup> For additional information on firearm restrictions for those subject to protection orders, see [NCPOFFC's Firearm Checklist for Advocates](#).

## The Military and Protection Orders

Registration of Civilian Orders on Military Installations: Protection orders issued by a civilian court are entitled to full faith and credit on military installations.<sup>10</sup> If a survivor has a civil protection order and either the survivor is connected to the military or the protection order is issued against a military member or their spouse or intimate partner, or against a civilian employee or their spouse or intimate partner who is assigned to a designated installation, advocates should assist the survivor with information on the policies and procedures for registering protection orders at military installations.<sup>11</sup>

Military Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit: Generally, a military protection order (MPO) does not meet the requirements for full faith and credit.<sup>12</sup> A commanding officer issues MPOs, and they are only enforceable on the installation where they are given. Because they are not court-issued, MPOs often do not meet the legal requirements for enforcement off base, such as providing formal notice to the accused and an opportunity to respond. For more information, please see the [Toolkit](#) for Serving Military Connected Survivors.<sup>13</sup>





# The Role of Law Enforcement

Law enforcement performs an integral role in ensuring that protection orders are enforced regardless of whether or not the order is registered in the enforcing jurisdiction. Therefore, it is important that responding officers are trained and understand that they cannot require registration of the order as a precondition to enforcement. In other words, if a survivor has a paper copy of a protection order that appears valid, the responding officer must enforce the order whether or not it is registered.

Without an available paper or digital copy of the protection order, the responding officers may be required to verify its existence and can do so by checking the local or state protection order registry or the federal database registry NCIC POF.

The officer will probably be able to make an arrest if three conditions exist:

- All of the pertinent information in the protection order has been successfully entered into the registry of the issuing jurisdiction and/or the NCIC POF.
- The issuing jurisdiction is able to quickly confirm the existence of the order and its provisions by accessing a paper copy or an electronic file.
- The officer determines that there is probable cause to believe the order was violated.

## Scenario:

*Carey is being stalked by his ex-spouse, who has threatened to harm him. In response, he obtains a protection order and later decides to move to be near his brother in a neighboring state for his safety. In his haste to leave, he inadvertently leaves behind his certified copy of the protection order. Carey's ex-spouse discovers out where he lives and shows up outside of the house, violating the stay-away provision of the protection order. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, Carey's brother calls the police for immediate assistance. The preceding hypothetical scenario illustrated how state registries can support enforcement of the full faith and credit provision of the Violence Against Women Act when no paper copy of a protection order is available at the scene of a violation.*

# How Advocates Can Assist Survivors with Registration in an Enforcing Jurisdiction?

- Help survivors find out whether there are any registration requirements in the jurisdictions where enforcement may be necessary.
- Note that requiring registration of protection orders as a prerequisite to enforcement is contrary to the language and intent of VAWA. Advocates should explain the law and the importance of enforcing valid protection orders.
- Discuss the risks and benefits of registration with survivors so they can decide whether it is safe and would be helpful.
- Help survivors obtain several certified copies of the protection order, as most jurisdictions require certified copies for registration or filing.
- Assist the survivor with confirming that the order was registered in the jurisdiction.
- Inform the victim of any address confidentiality provisions and how they might apply.

## How Advocates Can Help Improve Registration Procedures in Their Jurisdiction

Advocates working with court personnel should ensure the clerk staff can:

- Assist survivors who seek registration information.
- Establish procedures and court forms for filing or registering a protection order.
- Understand that, under VAWA, registration is an optional process and is not required for enforcement.<sup>14</sup>
- Recognize that registration is not considered a new filing or proceeding, so the respondent is not entitled to receive notice. To protect survivors and comply with federal law, court staff should specifically adhere to a policy of not notifying the respondent of the registration of the order unless requested by the survivor. If the survivor requests notification, only then should the court send notice to the respondent.<sup>15</sup>
- Ensure that their policies and procedures comply with federal law in that information regarding registration of a protection order is not made publicly available on the internet if such publication would reveal the identity or location of survivors.<sup>16</sup>
- Instruct the survivor on any forms that need to be completed, the information to be provided, and details about a local advocacy agency that may assist them with the process.
- Provide a free copy of the order bearing proof of registration to the survivor. In all circumstances, court staff should direct the survivor to present a copy of their order to the responding officer if enforcement is necessary.

For information and resources on facilitating enforcement of protection orders, see the [Tool and Resources for Attorneys and Advocates](#).

## ENDNOTES

1 See 18 U.S.C. § 2265(d)(2).

2 National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith & Credit, *Full Faith and Credit Statutes*, BATTERED WOMEN'S JUSTICE PROJECT (July 31, 2024), available at <https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/media/296/download>

3 See National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith & Credit, *State Registration Statutes* (rev. June 30, 2025) available at <https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/media/492/download>

4 *Id.*

5 The states that require this affidavit include Alabama, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virgin Islands, West Virginia. See National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith & Credit, *State Registration Statutes* (rev. June 30, 2025) available at <https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/media/492/download>

6 *Id.*

7 *Id.*

8 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(8); 18 U.S.C. § 2266(5).

9 For information on how courts can improve use of protective order registries to ensure that information is accurate and timely entered into NICS, see National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms, *Court Practice in Domestic Violence Protection Order Cases: Summary Information Forms* (January 2025), <https://nrcdvf.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/COURT-PRACTICE-IN-DOMESTIC-VIOLENCE-PROTECTION-ORDER-CASES.pdf>.

10 See 10 U.S.C. § 1561a - Civilian orders of protection: force and effect on military installations.

11 See DOD INSTRUCTION 6400.06 DOD COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE INVOLVING DOD MILITARY AND CERTAIN AFFILIATED PERSONNEL available at <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/640006p.pdf>

12 *Id.* Military Protection Orders: Protection orders issued by the military (generally issued by a commanding officer without providing the service member due process) are not entitled to full faith and credit in civilian courts, however, five jurisdictions: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Illinois, and Texas recognized military protection under certain circumstances. See National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith & Credit, *Full Faith and Credit Statutes*, BATTERED WOMEN'S JUSTICE PROJECT (July 31, 2024), available at <https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/media/218/download>

13 Toolkit for Serving Military Connected Survivors (English); (Spanish) available at <https://bwjp.org/site-resources/serving-military-connected-victims-survivors-of-domestic-abuse-2/>

14 18 U.S.C. § 2265(d)(2). available at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2265>

15 *Id.* 18 U.S.C. at § 2265(d)(1) ("A State, Indian tribe, or territory according full faith and credit to an order by a court of another State, Indian tribe, or territory shall not notify or require notification of the party against whom a protection order has been issued that the protection order has been registered or filed in that enforcing State, tribal, or territorial jurisdiction unless requested to do so by the party protected under such order."). available at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2265>

16 *Id.* 18 U.S. at § 2265(d)(3). available at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2265>



NCPOFFC provides customized training and guidance for advocates and other system actors on protection order issues, including registration and interstate enforcement of protection orders.

Contact NCPOFFC at [ncffc@bwjp.org](mailto:ncffc@bwjp.org) or 1-800-903-0111, prompt 2.

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