

New law going into effect in July aiming to protect victims of domestic violence

Digital Producer Meredith Depping, Reporter Afiq Hisham Jun 30, 2021 Updated Jul 1, 2021



Photo courtesy of Gabriel Delgado, MGN.

HELENA, Mont. - A new law is going into effect starting July that aims to protect victims of domestic violence in Montana.

In early May, Governor Greg Gianforte signed [House Bill 449](#), resulting in a revision of the state's domestic violence (DV) laws, making it easier for judges to order GPS monitoring for those suspected of certain DV and stalking charges, according to a release from SCRAM Systems.

While ankle monitors generally help officers keep tabs on suspects, they can now alert you to abusers through your

smartphone. Once you create digital safe spaces through the SCRAM Ally app, it lets you and the authorities know if a suspect in your case gets too close.

"The minimum is 500 feet, it goes out to 10 miles," said David Britt, the regional sales manager for SCRAM Systems in the Northwest. "It's on each individual case and what the court or judge has ordered in that individual case."

As someone who's been a victim of stalking himself, Retired Judge Greg Pinski tells Montana Right Now that knowing someone's out to get you can feel unnerving. "I know how both as a victim and as a judge how traumatic it can be," he said. "Domestic violence victims often face a lifetime of fear, anxiety, and trauma."

200 Montanans died at the hands of an intimate partner between 2000 and 2018, according to a report from The Montana Department of Justice.

With tracking bracelets now needed for bail in these cases, Pinski says this system removes some of that uncertainty, giving victims one less thing to worry about.

"The courts can know where [the suspects are] at all times," he said. "They can place zones of protection around the victim, where they work, schools and the like, and give them that sense of security."

"As a judge, I relied on monitoring technologies to protect domestic violence victims and assure a defendant's compliance with no contact orders, location restrictions, and alcohol prohibitions," Pinski added. "Not only do these technologies have a proven track record of protecting victims and the community, but they also save taxpayer dollars."

Senator Chris Friedel, Montana State Senate District 26 said the bill will allow victims of partner or family member assaults to have the security knowing the offender is required to be on GPS ankle monitoring, alcohol monitoring, or both.

Plus, Pinski says this approach can save taxpayers hundreds of dollars as an alternative to keeping suspects in county jails. "It costs a few dollars a day to have someone on a monitoring program, as opposed to having them be kept at the county jail at \$100 a day while they're awaiting trial," he said.

Britt says you can sign up for this program by calling police or sheriff deputies in your area, though they may charge you for enrolling depending on the agency.

As SCRAM systems work with people and local law enforcement moving forward, the former judge says this move is a good step in recognizing the impacts of domestic violence.