

Recent Violent Attacks Leave Many Lawyers Questioning Security

by Donald Scarinci

Lawyers are accustomed to being the subjects of verbal attacks from clients, opposing parties, and even their peers. However, [recent violent attacks against the legal community](#) are unsettling. Understandably, many attorneys are looking over their shoulder and questioning the strength of security measures at their offices and local courthouses.

The Center for Judicial and Executive Security reports that there have been over 400 incidents of violence against courts since 2005. They include shootings, stabbings, bombings, and arson attacks aimed at court officials, litigants, attorneys, and others.

Most recently, a bitter custody battle resulted in a Delaware man shooting his former daughter-in-law and another woman in a courthouse before turning the gun on himself. In Texas, a 57-year-old assistant district attorney in Kaufman County was shot and killed just outside the courthouse.

On the heels of these attacks, many [lawyers here in New Jersey](#) and across the country are questioning whether current courthouse security measures are enough. Procedures largely vary by state with some judicial officers armed with guns and others equipped with only a baton and pepper spray.

Connecticut, home to the recent Sandy Hook massacre, is one state reportedly considering changes that would allow judicial marshals to carry guns. In an open letter to court officials calling for such changes, Connecticut Attorney Thomas W. Teixeira aptly noted, [E]very day across this state, violent, unstable people line up in numbers to enter our courthouses. They do so under extreme duress, usually facing dire consequences and often with their enemies or victims standing just a few feet away.”

In Washington state, lawmakers are considering legislation that would make it a felony offense to attack anyone in a courthouse. “Courthouses by their very nature are dangerous places,” Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson testified in support of the bill. “We believe all citizens should have equal protection as they access our courts—victims, witnesses, jurors and family members.”