

# Domestic Violence Homicides, Suspicious Death or Missing Person

**Instructors: Melissa Hoppmeyer & Kathryn Marsh**

**Melissa Hoppmeyer** is the current Chief of the Special Victims and Family Violence Unit in Prince George's County, the second largest State's Attorney's Office in Maryland. She is an experienced prosecutor with a decade of experience, who has made her career tirelessly advocating for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Ms. Hoppmeyer has assisted in drafting numerous legislative bills and has testified before the Maryland General Assembly on numerous occasions to help implement stronger criminal laws for crimes of violence and to ensure that domestic violence and sexual assault victims are treated fairly throughout the civil and criminal judicial system. This includes most recently, during the 2020 Maryland legislative session lobbying, advocating, editing and testifying on behalf of a change to the first-degree assault statute, in order to make strangulation a first-degree assault, a felony under Maryland law. This change allowed Maryland to join the 48 other states that categorize strangulation as a felony.

Ms. Hoppmeyer also serves as a technical trainer for law enforcement, fellow prosecutors and the community on issues including consent education, sexual assault laws, child abuse investigations and prosecutions, domestic violence, criminal procedure, and how to properly conduct trauma-focused investigations. Ms. Hoppmeyer has trained around the state of Maryland as well as most recently presenting for a National Conference on Sexual Violence on college campuses.

Ms. Hoppmeyer has developed, drafted and implemented policies within the State's Attorney's Office that provide clear guidelines for how the unit operates, creating an 800 page unit manual that includes operating procedures, sample motions, draft memos as well as highlighting important case law and statutes specifically aimed for the unit. She and Ms. Marsh have also developed processes to address high risk cases. Specifically, developing a High Risk and High Lethality Protocol for all domestic violence cases. Ms. Hoppmeyer also successfully developed a County-wide strangulation protocol that created a unified response to strangulation events and increased successful prosecution of strangulation cases in the office. Ms. Hoppmeyer works as an integral part of the Multi-Discipline team working to obtain accreditation for Prince George's County's Child Advocacy Center.

Ms. Hoppmeyer has been asked to speak throughout the State of Maryland on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. Ms. Hoppmeyer developed an educational program called, "Will I be Believed" that is designed to teach the community about the process a victim of sexual assault goes through when he/she reports their sexual assault. Ms. Hoppmeyer serves of several councils and boards including the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee; Domestic Violence Coordinating Council; Sexual Assault Response Team and the Executive Board of the Child Advocacy Center. She is also the Co-Chair of the Criminal section of the Prince George's County Human Trafficking Task Force.

Before her service as a prosecutor, Ms. Hoppmeyer clerked for the Honorable Albert W. Northrop of the Prince George's County Circuit Court. Ms. Hoppmeyer earned her JD from The George Washington University. While earning her law degree, she worked as a legal assistant with the United States Office of Special Counsel and was actively involved in the Domestic Violence Clinic. Her efforts were recognized with the Community Legal Clinics Volunteer Service Award.

Ms. Hoppmeyer lives in Washington DC with her husband, two daughters and two dogs.

**Kathryn Marsh** is a career prosecutor of seventeen years and presently serves as Special Counsel, Assistant Chief of the Special Victims Family Violence Unit and Legislative & Co-Chair for the State's Attorney's Office in Prince George's County, Maryland. Ms. Marsh began her prosecutorial career in Calvert County Maryland, she worked in every division in the Calvert County office before becoming the Deputy State's Attorney. For the last twelve years Ms. Marsh has specialized in the child abuse and sexual assault cases. Mrs. Marsh also functions as professional trainer for Assistant State's Attorneys and staff, as well as for law enforcement, community organizations, State organizations and other legal professionals. She serves on several National

and State Task Forces and has been asked to assist in drafting legislation and has been called on to testify on behalf of criminal legislation before the Maryland legislature for several years. Ms. Marsh also worked as an adjunct professor of Criminal Law for the University of Maryland University Campus from 2009-2019. In addition to her work with the in the criminal law field, Ms. Marsh also serves on many community boards. She is currently the President of the Optimists of Calvert County, Treasurer of the Calvert Commission for Women and sits on the Board of Directors for the Library Foundation of Calvert County and the Board for Reading Camp Calvert. Mrs. Marsh has been recognized for her work with children and sexual assault prosecution numerous times, she was named one of Maryland's Top 100 women in 2019, received the Champion of Children award in 2018 and, and received the Respect for Law Prosecutor of the Year award in 2012.

**Course Objectives:**

- A missing person/ no body case
- An undetermined manner of death
- Past is Prologue
- Building and Presenting the Case

Overview: Every year there are a number of missing persons and presumed dead individuals or individuals who are deceased, but the manner of death is undetermined. What these cases have in common is a lengthy history of domestic violence. How can an investigation change a Medical Examiners opinion from undetermined to homicide? How can a homicide be charged in a no body case? This training will cover reopening cold cases, the use of cadaver dogs, and scene processing. The training will review how prior 911 calls, protective orders, social media posts and witnesses can be used to build and try the DV homicide.

