

Governor Signs Bills to Protect Domestic Abuse Victims

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Milwaukee?With survivors and advocates present, Governor Walker signed three bills on Wednesday to improve the state?s response to domestic violence.

SAFE Act

The SAFE (Stopping Abuse Fatalities through Enforcement) Act will require courts to verify that violent offenders surrender their firearms in accordance with a longstanding law in Wisconsin. The measure has been sought for several years, after a 2008 study found the vast majority of counties did not actively enforce the surrender requirement.

?The SAFE Act will save lives,? said Patti Seger, executive director of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin. ?We know a gun makes an abuser more dangerous and more lethal. Moving forward, Wisconsin will be actively disarming known batterers and child abusers.?

Assembly Bill 176

Another piece of legislation, Assembly Bill 176, makes a number of other changes to Wisconsin?s restraining order statutes. The bill will add stalking to the definition of domestic abuse and give child victims better privacy protections.

?Stalking in domestic violence cases is one of the greatest indicators of high risk,? said Seger. ?Wisconsin?s law will now reflect that reality.?

Earlier, Governor Walker signed AB 707 into law, which will provide for longer-term restraining orders in certain circumstances.

Senate Bill 160

The third bill, Senate Bill 160, will ensure that law enforcement officers refer victims to services after law enforcement responds to the scene of domestic violence incidents.

?We know that seeking services from a domestic violence advocate can be one of the most significant steps a victim can take to improve his or her safety,? said Seger. ?This bill will help break down the isolation and fear that allow abuse to thrive.

?We extend deep thanks to the authors of these bills: Representatives Bies, Jacque, Rodriguez, Berceau, Sprios, Kerkman and Bernard Schaber; and Senators Petrowski, Lazich, Taylor, Gudex and Ellis. Even more importantly, we thank the many survivors who shared their stories. They helped build understanding and support for these needed changes. We also appreciate that Governor Walker took the time to meet and hear from many of these survivors today before signing the legislation,? concluded Seger.

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