

State Senate Approves SAFE Act, Other Bills to Protect Victims

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MADISON ? End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin celebrated today as the State Senate passed a slew of bills to better protect victims of abuse.

?Today is a momentous day for survivors and advocates in Wisconsin,? said Patti Seger, executive director of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin.

One of the approved bills, the SAFE Act, will require judges to verify that abusers surrender their firearms while subject to restraining orders. A separate but related bill extended this requirement to another type of restraining order that protects victims of elder abuse.

?The SAFE Act is a proven way to save the lives of women, children and men,? said Seger. ?The bill will keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals.?

Research shows the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed. According to advocates, up to 80% of Wisconsin counties have no active enforcement procedure to verify that abusers surrender their firearms when ordered to do so.

Other improvements to restraining orders

In addition to the SAFE Act, the Senate approved other legislation to improve restraining orders in Wisconsin. Assembly Bills 176 and 707 will:

- Add stalking to the criteria for obtaining a domestic abuse restraining order;
- Protect the privacy of children in child abuse restraining order cases; and
- Give judges options to enter longer term restraining orders in high-risk cases.

Addressing human trafficking

Advocates are also hailing the passage of Assembly Bill 620, which bolsters the state?s response to human trafficking.

?Wisconsin takes a big leap forward for victims of human trafficking with the passage of Assembly Bill 620,? commented Seger.

The human trafficking bill gives victims the ability to seek the expungement of prostitution convictions that occurred as a result of their bondage. Advocates say this measure is critical to helping survivors of sex trafficking rebuild their lives and is key to appropriately recognizing survivors as victims of crime, rather than criminals.

Connecting victims to services

The State Assembly previously approved all of the measures; however, one bill, Senate Bill 160, still needs final Assembly action because of an amendment.

Senate Bill 160 would create better linkages between law enforcement and domestic violence victim service providers. Offering victims services has been shown to dramatically improve their safety and make their participation in the criminal justice process less traumatic and more effective.

?We thank Senators Petrowski, Taylor, Ellis, Gudex and Lazich and Representatives Bies, Jacque, Loudenbeck, Rodriguez and Jim Ott for their leadership in bringing about these vital legislative changes,? concluded Seger.

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