Assembly to Vote on Three Bills to Protect Victims

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Madison—The Wisconsin State Assembly is set to take up three bills to protect crime victims and domestic violence victims in particular. Victim advocates lauded the Assembly and lawmakers for bringing the measures forward.

“October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month,” said Patti Seger, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). “There is no better time for the legislature to act on this set of legislation that will improve legal protections for victims.”

The three bills on the Assembly calendar today are Assembly Bills 232, 247 and 269.

Strengthening Crime Victims Rights

The Crime Victim Rights Preservation Act or Assembly Bill 232, authored by Representative André Jacque, strengthens the enforcement of crime victim rights. The bill gives the Crime Victims Rights Board the ability to investigate and act when a crime victim is treated inappropriately by public officials. The legislation is based on the state constitution, which declares crime victims are to be treated with “fairness, dignity and respect for their privacy.” Legal decisions have stripped the authority of the Crime Victim Rights Board to enforce the constitutional provision.

The need to expand the power of the Crime Victim Rights Board was brought to light by the Ken Kratz case. Kratz is the former Calumet County District Attorney who sent sexually harassing text messages to a domestic violence victim whose case he was prosecuting.

“This bill is necessary to restore the meaning and intent of Wisconsin’s constitution, which requires victims be treated fairly,” said Seger. “The measure gives victims a way to be heard in the rare instances when officials do not respect the victim’s right to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect.”

Protecting Wisconsinites from Inter-state Abuse, Stalking and Harassment

Assembly Bill 247, brought forward by Representative Amy Loudenbeck, ensures Wisconsin courts will have jurisdiction to issue restraining orders against abusers who threaten or harass Wisconsinites from other states or who cause victims to flee to Wisconsin because of abuse that happened elsewhere. Proponents say the measure is in part necessary to address the increasing use of technology to facilitate inter-state stalking and harassment.

“Unfortunately, domestic violence and stalking don’t stop at state lines. Our laws must respond to that reality,” said Seger.

Closing Loopholes in Domestic Violence No-contact Conditions

Assembly Bill 269, authored by Representative Joan Ballweg, would close loopholes in laws related to no-contact orders. The main provision subjects abusers who violate the 72-hour no-contact condition, which applies after a domestic abuse arrest, to the same penalties as individuals who violate other conditions of release.

“Because of a technicality in Wisconsin law, perpetrators cannot be held in custody when they intentionally violate clear conditions of their release by contacting the victim during the 72-hour 'cooling-off' period,” said Seger. “This bill will ensure that police can hold offenders in custody when they have demonstrated a flagrant disregard for the law and wishes of victims.

“We are thankful that these proposals are moving forward,” concluded Seger. “And, we are grateful to the sponsors, Assembly leaders and bipartisan group of co-sponsors who support these needed protections for victims. We are hopeful the Assembly will approve these bills and that the State Senate will send them to the Governor’s desk to be signed into law.”

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