Bill Aims to Protect Wisconsinites from Out-of-State Abuse, Stalking and Harassment

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Current Law Immunizes Abusers in Other States from Restraining Order Petitions

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Madison—A bill to protect Wisconsin victims from inter-state abuse and stalking has started circulating for support in the state legislature. The legislation, authored by Rep. Amy Loudenbeck (Beloit) and Sen. Van Wanggaard (Racine), ensures that Wisconsin courts will have jurisdiction over abusers who threaten or harass Wisconsinites from other states or who cause victims to flee to Wisconsin because of abuse that happened elsewhere.

Victim advocates praised the release of the bill.

“Victims feel intense frustration and fear after being denied restraining orders because of gaps in our laws,” said Patti Seger, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). “We are grateful that Rep. Loudenbeck and Sen. Wanggaard are taking steps to ensure jurisdictional technicalities will no longer be a barrier for victims in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, domestic violence and stalking don’t stop at state lines. Our laws must respond to that reality.”

Courts in other states, including Indiana, Iowa and Washington, have wide authority to enter restraining orders against abusers who are non-residents.

“Wisconsin’s jurisdictional statutes were written to deal with lawsuits about things like product liability,” said Seger. “Petitions for restraining orders—court cases in which someone’s peace of mind, safety, or even life is on the line—are entirely different. This measure will modernize our laws to account for the fact that abuse knows no boundaries.”

Proponents of the bill also point out that it offers law enforcement a more cost-effective and streamlined way to deal with inter-state stalking and harassment cases.

“Under federal law, the restraining orders of one state can be fully enforced in every other state,” continued Seger. “There will be teeth behind orders issued under this bill because officials in other states will be able to arrest, prosecute and convict for violations of Wisconsin orders.”

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