Action Alert: Call your Legislators to Support 4 Bills to Protect Domestic Violence Victims

With a couple of quick phone calls, you can make a huge difference by urging your state legislators to co-sponsor four bills to protect domestic violence victims.

Please call your state legislators and ask them to "co-sponsor LRB 558, LRB 588, LRB 720 and LRB 1191."

LRB 558 (Rep. Jacque/Sen. Ellis) – This bill will allow victims and prosecutors to prevent evidence of abusers full pattern or violence and intimidation in trials for domestic abuse.

LRB 588 (Rep. Jacque/Sen. Petrowski) – This bill will help improve law enforcement's response to domestic violence by requiring referrals to domestic violence victim services and tracking situations in which officers do not arrest the perpetrator.

LRB 720 (Rep. Jacque/Sen. Petrowski) – This bill will make technical improvements and refinements to remove unnecessary barriers to victims and children obtaining protection.

LRB 1191 (Rep. Loudenbeck/Sen. Harsdorf) - This bill allows victims to apply for restraining orders against out of state perpetrators who direct abuse at Wisconsinites or have caused victims to flee to Wisconsin.

More information is below. Again, please call your state legislators and ask them to "co-sponsor LRB 558, LRB 588, LRB 720 and LRB 1191.

LRB 558 (Rep. Jacque/Sen. Ellis) – This bill would allow prosecutors and victims to present evidence of the full pattern of abuse in trials for domestic violence. One of the main challenges to prosecuting domestic violence is that the rules of evidence prohibit judges and juries from learning of perpetrators' *pattern* of terror and coercive control. Defense attorneys know juries are likely to never know about the full campaign of violence and abuse, and therefore, defendants have the advantage at trial or in plea negotiations. As a result, many repeat and dangerous abusers face only minimal accountability.

Recognizing this inherent problem, a number of states have amended their rules of evidence to allow prosecutors to present a fuller picture of the domestic violence to judges and juries. Five states, including our neighbors, Michigan and Minnesota, have amended their rules of evidence to admit evidence of prior acts of domestic violence during prosecutions. The high courts of Kansas and Vermont have developed similar policies through case law.

LRB 588 (Rep. Jacque/Sen. Petrowski) – This bill serves two purposes. First, the bill clarifies the intent and spirit of current law: that responding officers are to either arrest domestic violence perpetrators or file a report explaining why an arrest was not warranted. In the wake of the Azana Spa shooting in Brookfield, troubling information came to light regarding a lack of compliance with these aspects of Wisconsin's domestic violence laws.

Second, the bill ensures that responding officers will refer victims to local services and resources for shelter and support. Many times domestic violence victims are traumatized by intense isolation and fear, and they are not able to effectively participate in the criminal justice process. Under the bill, law enforcement officers will provide victims with information about services in the community to improve the chances the intervention will result in true safety and healing.

LRB 720 (Rep. Jacque/Sen. Petrowski) – This bill makes a number of needed technical improvements and refinements to Wisconsin's restraining order statutes. Research shows that restraining orders are effective at reducing or eliminating abuse in most cases. We therefore support eliminating unnecessary barriers from the restraining order process.

The bill adds stalking as a basis for obtaining a domestic abuse restraining order. Stalking behavior is a key indicator of higher risk and lethality in domestic violence situations. Other important provisions include removing obstacles for child abuse victims who seek protection through restraining orders. The legislation protects the confidentiality of child victims in these proceedings, and consistent with federal law, prohibits courts from charging *guardian ad litem* fees to the child victim or to a parent who is not party to the case.

LRB 1191 (Rep. Loudenbeck/Sen. Harsdorf) - This bill allows victims to apply for restraining orders against out of state perpetrators who direct abuse at Wisconsinites or have caused victims to flee to Wisconsin.

Restraining orders are often practically unavailable to victims in these situations. With the advance of technology, victims are now exposed to abusive behavior through phone calls, text messages, email and social media. Wisconsin's civil jurisdiction laws, which apply to restraining order cases, were not designed to respond to this type of conduct. As a result, victims are often told they must go to the abuser's home state to get a valid restraining order. For these victims, doing so may very well be unsafe or practically impossible.

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