

Advocates Applaud Assembly Actions Protecting Abuse Victims

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MADISON ? End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin offered praise for several bills passed by the State Assembly Thursday night. A vote on the priority piece of legislation for domestic abuse victims, the SAFE Act, is scheduled for Tuesday.

?The bills passed by the State Assembly represent significant improvements for victims of abuse, said Patti Seger, executive director of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin.

Assembly Bill 707, the first piece of legislation authored by Representative Rodriguez, offers judges options to enter longer term restraining orders in high-risk cases. Another bill, Assembly Bill 620, makes a number of changes that bolster Wisconsin?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.

The Assembly also approved bills to provide victims with stronger protections in cases involving vulnerable adults and with access to portions of pre-sentence investigations in criminal cases.

?As we are thankful for the Assembly?s actions today, we anxiously look forward to a vote on the SAFE Act (AB 464) next Tuesday,? said Patti Seger. ?This bill is a proven way to save the lives of women, children and men. The SAFE Act creates a mechanism for the active enforcement of current laws that keep guns out of the hands of dangerous abusers. We know from many recent tragedies that laws in the statute books are only as good as the enforcement that happens on the ground.?

The SAFE Act is a bipartisan bill that has the support of survivors, advocates and law enforcement.

The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed, which is why an existing law prohibits known domestic abusers from buying or possessing guns. But a 2008 study found that 70% of Wisconsin counties had no active enforcement procedure to verify that abusers comply with this law.

The SAFE Act would remedy this problem by ensuring that abusers who are banned under current law from possessing guns are asked about firearms they own or possess and by creating a court process to hold them accountable.

Seger believes the floor action on Thursday demonstrates there is momentum to pass the SAFE Act next week.

?We thank Representatives Loudenbeck, Rodriguez, Strachota and Jim Ott and Senators Petrowski and Lazich for their work on the legislation that passed Thursday. We also acknowledge the leadership of Attorney General Van Hollen. Their collective work is a testament to the state legislature?s desire to offer help to victims of abuse,? noted Seger. ?We urge all legislators to carry these efforts forward and save the lives of domestic abuse victims by also passing the SAFE Act next week.?

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