SAFE Act One Step Closer to Saving Lives

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MADISON ? On Tuesday night, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin celebrated the State Assembly?s passage of Assembly Bill 464, known as the SAFE Act.

The group also urged the State Senate to act quickly to send the bill to the Governor?s desk. The SAFE Act, which stands for Stopping Abuse Fatalities through Enforcement, would implement model court procedures to ensure that abusers surrender their firearms when required to do so under current law.

Advocates for victims say that enforcing current laws that ban abusers from owning guns should be a critical priority because the presence of a gun in the home of an abused woman makes it 500% more likely that the abused woman will be killed in a domestic violence homicide. Advocates also point to research that links disarming abusers during the restraining order process with significant reductions in domestic violence homicides.

?We know this legislation will keep women, children and men safer,? said Patti Seger, executive director of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin. ?When victims have the strength to come forward to get protection, we at least owe it to them to make reasonable efforts to enforce those protections.?

A 2008 study found that 70% of Wisconsin counties had no active enforcement procedure to verify that abusers comply with the firearm surrender laws in restraining order cases. The SAFE Act would ensure that all counties use a tested verification process.

The SAFE Act procedures were implemented in four Wisconsin counties as part of a pilot project. The results of the pilot project demonstrated that the procedures offender compliance and gave victims greater peace of mind.

?The SAFE Act is a proven way to save lives,? continued Seger. ?For close to two decades, the firearm surrender provisions of our restraining order laws looked good on paper, but, in reality, they left abusers to the honor system and left victims in vulnerable and deadly situations.

?With Tuesday?s vote in the Assembly, we only need the agreement of the State Senate to afford victims of abuse the commonsense protection they deserve. We urge the Senate to act soon,? Seger concluded. ?We extend sincere thanks Representative Bies for his leadership in moving the bill forward?

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