

Victim Organizations Join Calls for Veto of Bail Bondsmen

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Madison? Advocates for victims of domestic and sexual violence joined a growing group of individuals, leaders and organizations calling for the veto of a state budget provisions that would bring bail bondsmen to Wisconsin. While the groups note there are a number of positive items for victims in the budget, they say bail bondsmen would put victims at risk and jeopardize resources that support victim restitution and services.

“Bail bondsmen would take Wisconsin in the wrong direction,” said Pennie Meyers, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA). “Victims who take the courageous step of coming forward to hold perpetrators accountable deserve to have a judge make the ultimate decision about offenders’ release, not a for-profit entity.”

“We know the pre-trial period is incredibly dangerous for victims of domestic violence, because of the risk of intimidation and retaliation,” said Patti Seger, executive director of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin. “We want to create a system that prioritizes victim safety during this critical period. Bail bondsmen are a major impediment to that goal.”

The opposition to bail bondsmen has been nearly universal among Wisconsin law enforcement and court officials. Yesterday, Wisconsin Attorney General J. B. Van Hollen voiced his objections to the plan. In addition to the public safety concerns, he and others have cited the harmful effect bondsmen have on funding streams for crime victims.

“With bail bonds, victims and taxpayers lose out, while the bondsmen profits,” said Seger. “Because offenders don’t pay cash bond to the court, the state has little leverage with which to collect victim restitution and the fines that fund court costs and victim support services. If bail bonds are used in Wisconsin, it will result in offenders paying less money for victim services and other public expenses.”

“Victims of sexual assault experience so many financial costs for medical expenses, counseling and missed work—all on top of the trauma and psychological harm,” said Meyers. “Bail bondsmen would get paid and make a profit before victims recoup their losses. That is wrong.”

Both Seger and Meyers joined in concluding, “We appreciate and applaud the proactive steps Governor Walker and the Legislature have taken to support victims of domestic and sexual violence. We urge the Governor to continue that effort by preventing the use of bondsmen in Wisconsin.”

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