

Stalking Awareness Month Sees Advancement of Legislation to Protect Against Inter-state Abuse and Cyberharrassment

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Madison—Today, a bill to give Wisconsin courts jurisdiction over inter-state stalking, harassment and domestic abuse restraining order cases was favorably voted out of a state Senate committee. Advocates praised the committee's action and expressed hope that the full Senate would pass the measure this month, which is Stalking Awareness Month.

"There is no better time than this January, Stalking Awareness Month, to see this important measure move forward," said Patti Seger, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). "The legislation will give Wisconsin courts authority to issue restraining orders when out-of-state abusers use technology, like email or text messages, to stalk or harass Wisconsinites."

Assembly Bill 247 and Senate Bill 177 both moved forward. They are identical bills that provide clear jurisdiction for Wisconsin courts to issue restraining orders against abusers who are in other states.

Stalking Awareness Month began in 2004 to increase understanding of stalking as a dangerous and alarmingly common crime. A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that 714,000 Wisconsin women, or about one-third of all women in Wisconsin, have been attacked, raped or stalked by an intimate partner. Approximately half a million of these women were fearful or concerned for their safety. Nationally, one in four stalking victims report being stalked through the use of some form of technology (such as e-mail or instant messaging).

Advocates believe Assembly Bill 247 and Senate Bill 177 will provide an important tool to combat abuse that crosses state lines.

"We know that stalking and other forms of abuse don't stop at state borders; yet in some cases, the jurisdiction of our courts do," said Seger. "A victim's ability to get a restraining order shouldn't depend on legal technicalities. This measure will ensure that our laws stay up-to-date and provide protection that is effective in our increasingly mobile and technological society."

Having already passed the state Assembly, passage by the full Senate would be the last stop for the bill on its way to Governor Walker's desk.

"We hope the bill passes the full Senate quickly and is soon law," concluded Seger. "Victims deserve immediate protection."

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