State Senate Passes Important Victim Bills

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Madison--Today, the state Senate passed the Wisconsin Crime Victim Rights Restoration Act and a bill that permits domestic violence and stalking victims to legally change their names confidentially. Victim advocates praised the both actions.

“Wisconsin has a history of leading the nation in guaranteeing crime victim rights. Passage of the Crime Victim Rights Restoration Act is an important part of that history, said Patti Seger, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). Soon, a victim’s right to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect for privacy—which is spelled out in our state constitution—will be enforceable.”

“The 2010 controversy regarding the district attorney who sent sexually harassing text messages pointed out a troubling gap in our victim rights laws,” continued Seger. “Even though the state does an admirable job supporting victims’ involvement in the criminal justice process, a victim’s constitutional right to be treated appropriately has not had any teeth behind it. This bill corrects that problem.”

In addition to the Crime Victim Rights Restoration Act, the Senate passed Assembly Bill 379, which provides a mechanism for individuals in danger to legally change their names in a confidential manner. Current law requires, without exception, that individuals requesting a name change publish the old and new name through a legal notice in the newspaper. Victim advocates say for victims this requirement is a “catch-22” that needs to be corrected.

“Our legal department has fielded numerous questions from victims, advocates and attorneys who can’t understand why someone who is trying to avoid an abuser or a stalker would be forced to broadcast their name and location far and wide,” explained Seger. “We are pleased that the legislature addressed this issue and that soon there will be a way for victims to gain an additional measure of safety.”

Both bills had previously gained approval in the Assembly. The Assembly will need to concur in a technical Senate amendment to the Crime Victim Rights Restoration Act, and then, both bills will head to the Governor’s desk for his signature.

“We wish to thank the bi-partisan group of legislators who supported these pieces of legislation,” concluded Seger. “We especially owe thanks to the main authors, Representative André Jacque and Senator Van Wanggaard, authors of the Crime Victim Rights Restoration Act, and Representative Keith Ripp and Senator Shelia Harsdorf, authors of the confidential name change legislation.”

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