

End Domestic Abuse WI: Applaud Family and Medical Leave Insurance act

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Madison, WI – Advocates at End Domestic Abuse WI are celebrating the introduction of state legislation that would create a Wisconsin Family and Medical Leave Insurance program. This bill, introduced by Representative Sondy Pope and state Senator Janis Ringhand, would empower Wisconsin workers to take paid time off from work to take care of their own serious health condition, to care for a family member with a serious health condition, to care for a new baby, or in the case of domestic violence victims, take time to access critical lifesaving services.

“Without time off from work, victims are unable to access the services they need to start a violence-free life,” said Patti Seger, Executive Director of End Domestic Abuse WI. “Often victims cannot take action because of inflexible employment obligations. For example, our local programs often receive calls from shift workers who cannot go to court during business hours to get a restraining order or petition for divorce because they would risk losing their jobs. As domestic violence abusers take advantage of financial vulnerabilities, victims are often caught in untenable

situations.”

Guaranteeing paid leave for workers will allow victims of domestic violence the freedom to seek medical attention or obtain psychological or other counseling, obtain services from local victim service providers or relocate. Additionally, without paid leave, victims are often unable to initiate, prepare for, testify, assist, or otherwise participate in any civil or criminal action or proceeding. Yet, these are the activities that have been shown to reduce and eliminate domestic and sexual violence. One survey found that taking legal action, relocating or working with an advocate significantly increased the chances a woman would leave an abusive relationship, which in turn improved her physical health.

Although both the federal and Wisconsin Family Medical Leave Acts (FMLA's) do provide important protections to some workers, a significant portion of the workforce is not eligible for these protections and both FMLA's only provide for unpaid time off, which is not financially possible for many employees.

“If victims take time off of work to escape an abuser, they could very well lose the income they need to be independent and support their children,” added Seger. “Moreover, police and prosecutors cannot bring perpetrators to justice unless victims are able to appear at legal proceedings. This legislation is an important step towards protecting and empowering victims of abuse all across Wisconsin.”