

Marsy's Law for Wisconsin: Nearly 80 percent of Wisconsinites support amending state Constitution to ensure equal rights for crime victims

Posted on Wednesday, May 31, 2017

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Madison, Wisconsin – Marsy's Law for Wisconsin today released a statewide poll showing nearly 80 percent of Wisconsinites support updating the state Constitution to ensure equal rights for crime victims, with even stronger support once Wisconsinites are asked about specific rights, like the right to speak up during the criminal justice process.

“The overwhelming majority of Wisconsinites support updating our state Constitution to ensure equal rights for crime victims because they know it’s the right thing to do,” said Teri Jendusa- Nicolai, a survivor of a brutal 2004 attack and statewide advocate for victims’ rights. “Wisconsin has a proud history of leading on victims’ rights, and now we have an opportunity to truly level the playing field by giving them equal rights – the kind of rights I wished I had during my terrifying and painful fight for justice.”

The poll, conducted in May, found that 79 percent of respondents supported amending the state Constitution to ensure equal rights for crime victims, as is proposed under Marsy's Law for Wisconsin's bipartisan legislation, once they were told it would “elevate victims’ rights to the Constitution, guaranteeing that victims are heard throughout the process and granted standing to ask that those rights be

protected.” Other key findings included:

- 81 percent of respondents supported a victim’s right to speak up “at every key point in the criminal justice process including release, plea, sentencing and parole hearings.”
- 68 percent of respondents were “more likely” to support a state legislative candidate who was backing the measure. On the other hand, 60 percent of respondents would be “less likely” to support a District Attorney who opposed the effort.
- Only 15 percent of respondents opposed amending the state Constitution to ensure equal rights for crime victims.

You can read Teri’s story of survival [here](#), and find facts on Marsy’s Law for Wisconsin’s bipartisan legislation below:

- **Marsy’s Law for Wisconsin follows a proud tradition in our state, unlike many other states.** Wisconsin already has a constitutional amendment on victims’ rights that passed in 1993, and was the first state in the nation to pass a Crime Victims’ Bill of Rights. The state also is recognized as having some of the strongest statutory rights for victims in the country. This means the changes Marsy’s Law for Wisconsin is proposing are about making sure victims’ rights are truly equal alongside the constitutional rights of the accused – nothing more, nothing less – not introducing new rights as has been done in other states across the country.
- **Marsy’s Law for Wisconsin strengthens rights that already exist in Wisconsin.** The proposed amendment would do two things: Elevate certain rights currently under state statute to be fully constitutional rights, and strengthen other rights that are already part of the Constitution. An example of a right that is the law under state statute but needs to be elevated to the Constitution is the right to put victim restitution payments ahead of any dollars owed to the government. An example of a current constitutional right that needs clarification is the right to be heard throughout the legal process, including release, plea, sentencing, disposition, parole, revocation, expungement, or pardon – as opposed to just disposition.
- **Marsy’s Law for Wisconsin is building a statewide legislative and campaign effort.** In order to amend the state Constitution, the proposal must pass

two consecutive state Legislatures, then be put to the voters on the ballot. It is currently possible for Marsy's Law for Wisconsin's proposal to be on the ballot in 2019. A [statewide digital ad](#) and billboard advertising have accompanied Marsy's Law for Wisconsin's efforts building support in the state Legislature and with allies across the state.

Marsy's Law for Wisconsin has bipartisan support from 42 Republicans and Democrats in the state Legislature, plus a broad and growing statewide coalition. Since first unveiling its bipartisan legislation April 4, Marsy's Law for Wisconsin has been co-sponsored by 40 Republicans and Democrats in the Legislature, in addition to sponsors Sen. Van Wanggaard and Rep. Todd Novak. [Click here](#) for a list of the broad and growing coalition of groups and public officials supporting Marsy's Law for Wisconsin, which includes victims' rights groups, law enforcement, attorneys, survivors of crime, and their supporters in communities across Wisconsin.

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About Marsy's Law for Wisconsin

Marsy's Law for Wisconsin is a grassroots coalition that has developed a unique proposal to give victims of crime equal rights in our state, building on Wisconsin's laws and history of leading on this issue. Marsy's Law is named after Marsalee "Marsy" Nicholas of California who was stalked and killed by her ex-boyfriend in 1983. Only one week after her death, Marsy's mother and brother, Henry T. Nicholas, walked into a grocery store where they were confronted by the accused murderer. The family, who had just come from a visit to Marsy's grave, was unaware that the accused had been released on bail. In an effort to honor his sister, Dr. Nicholas has made it his life's mission to give victims and their families constitutional protections and equal rights.

Victims and supporters interested in sharing their stories can email Wisconsin@marsyslaw.us.