

WISPIRG: Faith-based and consumer advocates thank legislators who protected Wisconsin consumers

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Faith-Based and Consumer Advocates Thank Legislators Who Protected Wisconsin Consumers

Organizations representing people of faith and consumers from around the state expressed their gratitude to all those who worked to preserve the Wisconsin Consumer Act (WCA) in the face of efforts by the rent-to-own (RTO) industry to eliminate existing consumer protections. Had either Senate Bill 637 or Assembly Bill 759 become law, the number of disreputable national RTO stores in the state would have significantly increased, consumers would have lost protections against deceptive business and abusive collection practices, and thousands of Wisconsin residents would have faced new financial hardships.

In opposing these bills, advocates reiterated that the WCA does not ban RTO sales in Wisconsin. “Reputable, transparent rent-to-own business already can – and do – operate under current law in Wisconsin, proving that it is indeed possible to build a thriving business while abiding by our consumer protection laws,” said Peter Skopec, Director of the Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG). “What we object to is our government giving special concessions to out-of-state businesses with track records of predatory behavior that has hurt vulnerable families across the nation.”

Advocates were grateful for the support of a bipartisan group of legislators who sustained Wisconsin’s tradition of promoting consumer protection and fair business

standards. “We especially thank those members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism who voted against Senate Bill 637,” said Peter Bakken, Public Policy Coordinator for the Wisconsin Council of Churches. “They are to be commended for putting the needs of vulnerable consumers before outside interests.” The Committee members who voted against the bill’s advancement were Senators Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon), Mark Miller (D-Monona), Chris Larson (D-Milwaukee), Kathleen Vinehout (D-Alma), and Patty Schachtner (D-Somerset).

The advocates also thanked all those individuals and organizations who spoke out against these proposed changes to Wisconsin consumer protection laws. “Please don’t ever doubt that you can make a difference,” said Wisconsin Catholic Conference Executive Director Kim Wadas, adding, “We hope that the RTO industry finally understands that abiding by the WCA is good for everyone.”

In addition to WISPIRG, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, and the Wisconsin Council of Churches, the groups that are grateful for legislative opposition include End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin and the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources.