

Marsy's Law: Bringing Wisconsin victims to forefront three months after taking effect

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MADISON – The approved crime victims' constitutional amendment commonly known as Marsy's Law for Wisconsin has now been in effect for three months after its ratification vote was certified on May 4th. The measure was approved during the Spring election by an overwhelming margin, with 75 percent of Wisconsin residents casting votes in favor of the crime victims' constitutional amendment. Now, criminal justice system stakeholders and victim advocates from around Wisconsin are joining the grassroots organization that helped champion the new amendment in praising the impact of the measure on Wisconsin crime victims.

"As a leader in victims' rights, Wisconsin now has an additional tool to strengthen our best practices," said Veronica Figueroa Velez, Executive Director of UNIDOS. "Marsy's Law provides victims the opportunity to now be taken into account at every step of the process. As an organization, Marsy's Law assists advocates in ensuring that victims' rights are protected."

"Since Marsy's Law went into effect in Wisconsin, victims' rights have been more closely considered throughout the criminal justice system, ensuring that victims are not an afterthought," said Brown County Sheriff Todd J. Delain. "Marsy's Law has created a significantly better opportunity for victims to be meaningfully engaged and heard. Victims can now be confident that their rights are a high priority in a busy criminal justice system that has always been focused on offender rights."

"Wisconsin's legal system has already seen a significant shift towards a greater emphasis on victims' rights since Marsy's Law for Wisconsin went into effect," said Bronson Stein, Legal Advocate at Bolton Refuge House in Eau Claire. "The new

amendment has truly brought victims' rights to the forefront."

Examples of the impact of the new amendment have already been seen in criminal proceedings throughout Wisconsin. A [Kenosha County victim of sexual assault](#) and attempted homicide was able to exercise her new right to be heard in court at a bond hearing to ask the judge not to grant her attacker the release he was seeking because he contracted COVID-19 while in jail awaiting trial. In a recent [Janesville murder case](#), the grieving family of the deceased were afforded the opportunity to speak during the June sentencing hearing, which was streamed on YouTube, but their identities were protected under the privacy rights within the new amendment. In a high-profile [Waukesha County sexual assault case](#), the new amendment allowed the victim to assert her right to be present at sentencing.

"Wisconsin was already a leader in victims' rights, and Marsy's Law has strengthened and codified many of our best practices into a uniform set of rights that are now protected by the state constitution," said Jessica Bielmeier, Victim and Legal Advocate at ASTOP Sexual Abuse Center in Fond du Lac. "Crime victims are now being taken into account at every stage of the legal process, with the continuation and promise that these stages focus on being victim-centered."

"We're thrilled to see Marsy's Law already having a real impact on the criminal justice process in Wisconsin," added Marsy's Law for Wisconsin Outreach Director Nela Kalpic. "We know and appreciate that stakeholders in the law enforcement and victim services communities are working hard to apply the new amendment and ensure that victims are granted their constitutionally guaranteed rights, and we're already seeing the positive outcome as victims are playing a more central role in legal proceedings."

Over 1.1 million Wisconsin residents cast votes in favor of the crime victims' constitutional amendment in the April election, approving the measure with a vast margin of more than 700,000 votes. The amendment was approved in 2019 for placement on the April 2020 ballot after passing the Wisconsin State Senate and Assembly with broad bipartisan support in two consecutive legislative sessions. The overwhelming ratification vote marked the final procedural step for the now approved constitutional amendment.