

Mary's Law for WI: Victim advocates urge support for crime victims' constitutional amendment

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MADISON – A group of Wisconsin's leading victim service organizations today urged support for the proposed crime victims' constitutional amendment commonly known as Marsy's Law for Wisconsin. Representing communities around the state, the organizations have rallied around the bipartisan initiative ahead of the upcoming April 7 statewide vote on the proposed amendment.

Pennie Meyers, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA), said: "Marsy's Law updates our state constitution to give crime victims in Wisconsin rights that are equal to those currently afforded to perpetrators. These improvements are particularly important for sexual assault survivors, who experience significant barriers to seeking justice. Our hope is that by enacting Marsy's law, this will begin to reduce those barriers thus leading to increased accountability for offenders as well as an increased ability for victims to assert their rights."

Veronica Figueroa Velez, Executive Director of UNIDOS, a domestic violence agency in Madison, said: "As someone who works daily with victims of crime, I have seen firsthand how tenuous victims' rights are in our legal system. We are part of a culture that sends a constant message to victims that their rights and their lives matter less than the accused. This system continues to perpetuate violence over and over again. This is why I support granting additional rights to crime victims to help level this playing field."

Sandy, Johnson, Executive Director of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Rock County, said: "I know firsthand how important it is that victims of

abuse and neglect have a voice within the court system. No matter their age, every victim deserves a voice, equal rights, and the constitutional support to protect them. This is why I fully support the passage of Marsy's Law in Wisconsin."

Lyn Beyer, Executive Director of Reach Counseling in Oshkosh, said: "In a system of justice that too often trumps the rights of victims, Marsy's Law offers a bill of rights that provides respect, dignity, and empowerment for victims and their families. For sexual assault victims, the system often doesn't work and they are revictimized in the process. Marsy's Law will open the doors to increase victim rights that are desperately needed in our criminal justice system."

Pat Stein, Executive Director of Bolton Refuge House in Eau Claire, said: "Marsy's Law is needed in the State of Wisconsin to ensure victims' rights are being upheld throughout the court process. The bill will strengthen and expand the existing laws for victims, ensuring victims will be able to invoke their constitutional rights. Victims have the right to feel safe and secure while utilizing the legal process."

Carmen Pitre, President & CEO of Sojourner Family Peace Center in Milwaukee, said: "Sojourner has always supported survivors having as much information as they need to increase their safety. If this amendment is approved by voters, we will work diligently with our partners to ensure that these rights are meaningful to survivors."

Kelsey M. Hood-Christenson, Director of Survivor Empowerment Services at Beloit Domestic Violence Survivor Center, said: "Family Services is supporting Marsy's Law because we feel victim's rights are vital to ensure survivors are protected and supported during the judicial process. The strengthening of survivor's rights with Marsy's Law is only going to further this and improve the judicial response to survivors."

The organizations are part of a statewide grassroots coalition which has earned nearly 400 key endorsements for the proposed amendment including victims' advocates, elected officials, law enforcement leaders, and statewide associations. The victim service and advocacy organizations that have announced their support for the proposed crime victims' constitutional amendment include:

- Association for the Prevention of Family Violence
- Beloit Domestic Violence Survivor Center

- Bolton Refuge House
- CASA of Rock County
- Center Against Sexual & Domestic Abuse, Inc.
- Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
- Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services
- Dove INC
- E3inspire
- Golden House
- HELP of Door County
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
- New Day Shelter
- Reach Counseling
- Sojourner Family Peace Center
- Survivor's Journey to Peace
- The Asha Project
- UNIDOS
- Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- Wisconsin Nurses Association
- Women and Children's Horizons
- YWCA Rock County

Introduced for second consideration as Assembly Joint Resolution 1/Senate Joint Resolution 2 the bipartisan victims' rights legislation was approved in 2019 for placement on the April 2020 ballot after passing the Wisconsin State Senate and Assembly with overwhelming bipartisan support in two consecutive legislative sessions. The upcoming April 7 ratification vote marks the final step in the approval process for the proposed constitutional amendment.