

Marsy's Law for Wisconsin: Recognizes One Year of Crime Victims' Constitutional Amendment in Action

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MADISON – Today marked the one-year anniversary of the historic statewide vote on the crime victims' constitutional amendment commonly known as Marsy's Law for Wisconsin. In recognition of this crucial milestone, supporters of the amendment today held a virtual press conference highlighting examples of Marsy's Law at work in Wisconsin. The press conference featured the two lead authors of the bipartisan victims' rights legislation, Senator Van Wanggaard and Representative Todd Novak, alongside a number of prominent survivors and victims' rights advocates from communities throughout Wisconsin.

"As a survivor of violent crime myself, I was immensely proud to have been a part of the effort to enshrine equal rights for Wisconsin crime victims into our state's constitution.," said Marsy's Law for Wisconsin advocate Teri Jendusa-Nicolai, who became one of the state's most prominent victims' rights advocates after surviving a brutal attack by her ex-husband. "One year after Marsy's Law became a reality in the Badger State, I am even prouder to see the positive impact that the new amendment has had on real Wisconsin crime victims."

The measure was approved with an overwhelming margin during the April 7, 2020 spring election, with 75 percent of voters—or 1.1 million Wisconsin

residents—casting votes in favor of the crime victims’ constitutional amendment.

“The commitment provided in Marsy’s Law to protect the rights of victims no less vigorously than the rights of the accused may finally bring about the equity that victim advocates have been attempting to establish since Wisconsin’s first Crime Victim’s Rights Bill was passed in 1980,” said Bronson Stein, Legal Advocate at Bolton Refuge House in Eau Claire. “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. The new amendment has truly brought victims to the forefront.”

“The implementation of the new crime victims’ constitutional amendment has fostered a trauma-informed environment for victims within our legal system,” added David Williams, Polk County Victim Witness Coordinator and President of the Wisconsin Victim/Witness Professionals Association. “Now, victims are being afforded the right to speak at important hearings throughout the legal process, ensuring that victims have the opportunity to be heard. Our judges in Polk County are victim focused, and Marsy’s Law has changed our courthouse for the better.”

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.

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Read more examples of how Marsy’s Law is working in Wisconsin:

During the April 7, 2020 spring election, an overwhelming 75 percent of Wisconsin voters voted to ratify the crime victims’ rights constitution amendment known as Marsy’s Law. All 72 of Wisconsin counties voted yes on Marsy’s Law.

The successful vote was a culmination of nearly four years of hard work by the Marsy’s Law for Wisconsin team and its supporters in the Legislature, the victim advocate community and law enforcement. After a lengthy and rigorous vetting process in the Legislature, the amendment passed in 2017 and 2019 with 87 percent of lawmakers voting yes. Marsy’s Law for Wisconsin was endorsed by over 400 criminal justice system stakeholders including victim service agencies,

community groups, district attorneys, sheriffs and police chiefs.

Since it's been in effect, Marsy's Law has provided victims with a stronger voice to make sure they are no longer treated as uninterested observers in the courtroom. Some examples of Marsy's Law at work that have made it into the news include:

- Just days after Marsy's Law went into effect last May, 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.
- In a high-profile [Waukesha County sexual assault case](#), the new amendment allowed the victim to assert her right to be present at sentencing.
- Marsy's Law allowed a [grieving family from Rock County to protect their privacy](#) as they spoke at the sentencing hearing for a man who shot and killed their loved one.
- The [mother of a young murder victim was able to exercise her right](#) to be heard in a Dane County courtroom to express concern over a plea deal.
- A Waupaca County victim of [sexual assault is being allowed to make arguments](#) in court objecting to his private medical and mental health records being entered into his accused abuser's trial.
- A grandmother of a murdered newborn in Green County was able to [petition the court to keep the confessed killer of her granddaughter in custody](#) for the safety of her family.
- In a Columbia County case, [a murdered woman's family has been able to protect the victim's identity](#) from being made public by exercising their right to privacy.

Each and every day, Marsy's Law is helping Wisconsin's crime victims as they navigate the criminal justice system through no fault of their own.

One year later, Marsy's Law is working for Wisconsin!