

# Wausau Pilot: Statement on anti-SLAPP legislation

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Today, Sen. Melissa Agard (D-Madison) and Sen. Jimmy Anderson (D-Fitchburg) held a press conference introducing anti-SLAPP legislation they are proposing for Wisconsin.

As you may have read in the *New York Times* and other publications, Wausau Pilot & Review is battling a defamation lawsuit filed in 2021 against the publication, its editor and a reporter for coverage stemming from a Marathon County Board meeting. A judge dismissed the case in April, but Sen. Cory Tomczyk (R-Mosinee) is appealing that decision.

More than 30 states have legislation that provide a mechanism for defendants to challenge and dismiss lawsuits that lack substantive legal merit and can burden journalists with crushing financial costs, but Wisconsin does not.

“Anti-SLAPP laws play a crucial role in protecting our constitutional right to freedom of the press and freedom of speech,” said Shereen Siewert, founder and publisher of Wausau Pilot & Review. “This is not a red vs. blue issue, but a bipartisan issue of fairness. Local news coverage is critical to a thriving democracy. This bill would discourage meritless lawsuits in the future and help local news organizations continue to serve their communities without risking their livelihood every step of the way.”

Wausau Pilot & Review, launched in 2017, is a local, nonprofit, online newspaper with a staff of four. [A GoFundMe effort launched last week](#) to help defray the organization’s considerable legal expenses, not currently recoverable under Wisconsin law, has so far raised more than \$102,000, about one-third of its \$150,000 goal.

“We are overwhelmed with gratitude,” Siewert said.