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MEDIA CONTACT:

Patrick Guarasci, G Strategies, LLC
patrick@gstrategiesllc.com; Cell: (608) 692-0195

Wisconsin Progressives Launch Effort to Reverse Assaults on Democracy through the Courts

Madison, Wis. – Law Forward, a new initiative that will defend Wisconsin from ongoing attacks on the state’s progressive traditions, launched today. As part of its work, the organization will fight to protect all Wisconsinites from efforts to suppress voter participation in the 2020 election next month; going forward, it will focus on a range of issues including fair redistricting and restoring essential checks and balances to our government. Law Forward is a non-profit law firm that works in close collaboration with allies across the state and beyond. By protecting the interests of ordinary people under the Wisconsin and U.S. Constitutions, Law Forward will defend the principles of good governance, fair play and equality.

“Wisconsin’s ruthless legislative leadership has undertaken a systematic effort to undercut democratic norms and to disenfranchise voters,” said founder, president and lead counsel Jeffrey A. Mandell, a prominent lawyer in Madison. “Rather than legislating to address the needs of Wisconsin families, they have repeatedly used the courts as a tool to entrench their own power. The people deserve to have an advocate in these fights. Law Forward will aggressively combat these efforts and stand in defense of Wisconsin’s proud, progressive tradition of innovation and pragmatism.”

Respected Madison trial attorney Douglas M. Poland will serve as the litigation director, bringing with him a full decade of experience in challenging unlawful gerrymandering in federal courts. Law Forward has also hired its first full-time staff counsel Mel Barnes, who brings an insightful, strategic perspective on how Wisconsin’s government interacts with the most contentious and important issues.



The organization's diverse Legal Advisory Council will be co-chaired by former Senator Russ Feingold and former Lt. Governor Barbara Lawton.

"Law Forward is essential infrastructure to protect the rule of law in Wisconsin," said Senator Feingold, president of the American Constitution Society and co-chair of Law Forward's Legal Advisory Council. "We need a savvy, strategic, systemic effort to rebuff the assault on Wisconsin democracy that has been underway for a decade now. I am confident that Law Forward is the effort we so badly need to ensure a functioning democracy and move Wisconsin in a better direction."

Lt. Governor Lawton, a co-chair of Law Forward's Legal Advisory Council, said, "A many decades-long concerted conservative attack on Wisconsin democracy, funded by dark money, has taken a toll on families and on our communities across the state. Now we will have Law Forward to stand up for us, give us voice in our courts and ensure government works on behalf of all Wisconsinites. Now, finally, we will have a consistent, coordinated progressive voice for justice in Wisconsin courts."

The organization is already prepared to prosecute litigation necessary to address any attempts to suppress vote participation on or before Election Day, and will continue to focus on strategic impact litigation designed to counteract recent destructive efforts by the conservative legal movement to transform Wisconsin's legal landscape. In particular, Law Forward is well positioned to challenge extreme partisan attempts to gerrymander election districts based on Mandell's experience in Wisconsin's appellate courts, Poland's expertise on redistricting issues—including his experience on the legal team that brought the *Gill v. Whitford* partisan gerrymandering case to the U.S. Supreme Court—and Barnes's work at Planned Parenthood bringing strategic impact litigation focused on constitutional questions.

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