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Contact: Rep. Joel Kleefisch

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(888) 534-0038

Helping Victims of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a horrific crime that can have devastating consequences and leave life-long trauma on the victim. It is estimated that every two minutes, a person is a victim of sexual assault here in our country. As Chair of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am a huge advocate for victims and services that help sexual assault victims recover and live their lives as best and fully as they possibly can. This session, I was honored to help pass two pieces of legislation that help victims of sexual assault.

One of these bills, Senate Bill 323, gives sexual assault, human trafficking, and child sexual abuse victims greater access to victim advocates. A victim advocate is available free of charge to these victims and is there to help the victim through the hospital, exam, and law enforcement and criminal justice processes. It has been found that survivors of sexual crimes who have received services from a victim advocate experience better outcomes and are in less distress.

Further, as many college students return to their college campuses this fall, sexual assault at college is an unfortunate reality that affects countless women. The National Institute of Justice reports that less than 5% of rapes of college women are reported to law enforcement. While there are many reasons for this, a 2015 survey found that almost 75% of victims were consuming alcohol at the time of their assault. To assist these victims and to make it easier for victims to report sexual assault crimes, this session we passed Assembly Bill 808. AB 808 provides amnesty from an underage drinking ticket to the victim of a sexual assault. The bill also extends amnesty to a bystander who is helping the sexual assault victim.

Being the victim of sexual assault is horrifying in itself. However, sometimes the aftermath can be similarly terrifying. It is my hope that these two bills, which passed both houses of the Legislature unanimously and have been signed into law, will give victims some much needed reassurance and assistance as they obtain help and work with law enforcement to press charges on the criminals.

*Rep. Joel Kleefisch can be reached at P.O. Box 8952, Madison, WI 53702-8952,
or by calling toll-free 1 (888) 534-0038, or by email at
Rep.Kleefisch@legis.wi.gov*

Capitol Office: Post Office Box 8952 · Madison, WI 53702-8952
(608) 266-8551 · Toll-Free (888) 534-0038 · Rep.Kleefisch@legis.wi.gov