

'Locker room bill' backed locally

Measure would hike penalties for high-tech peeping on kids

BY JILL TATGE-ROZELL
jrozell@kenoshanews.com

The mother of a child who was secretly videotaped in a locker room made an impassioned plea this week for stiffer penalties in such crimes when children are involved.

Christina Walker testified before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety in support of Senate Bill 452, which would add an enhancer to the charge when a child's privacy has been invaded in this way.

The "locker room bill," as it is called, was introduced by Rep. Samantha Kerkman, R-Salem, and co-sponsored by Sen. Van Wanggaard, R-Racine, and Sen. Robert Wirch, D-Somers, in response to the clandestine taping of women and children at the Rec Plex, as well as in a hotel room and in the locker room at the headquarters of Uline in Pleasant Prairie.

"Completely by accident, I discovered two cameras in the sanctity and safety of the women's locker room," Walker recalled.

Video of her nude, 10-year-old

daughter was found on the tape.

"We were left with a shattered sense of safety," she said. "I had to explain things to a young child that no mother should have to. . ."

When she learned that the charges to be filed would be the same regardless if the victims were adults or children, "I thought to myself, 'This can't be right. It just can't be,'" she told committee members.

Kerkman said the bill aims to "increase the penalty for all invasions of privacy and capture of nudity offenses when the victim is under 18 years old."

"It was a shock to our community and one that highlighted a need to stiffen penalties for locker-room specific crimes," Kerkman said. "The harm in this incident clearly shows we need to increase penalties for this behavior."

Kerkman said the bill is also appropriately timed as the Legislature has been working on laws related to the invasion of privacy that are the result of new technology. The cameras used in the incident were



FACEBOOK/SAMANTHA KERKMAN PHOTO

Rep. Samantha Kerkman R-Salem, right, introduced the "locker room" legislation. Joining her in local testimony at the public hearing was Pleasant Prairie Police Chief David Smetana, left, and Christina Walker, a parent of one of the children videotaped in the RecPlex case.

tiny, high-tech devices.

"The Legislature recently updated the state's laws on invasions of privacy and depicting nudity with up-skirting and revenge-porn crimes, so it is appropriate to re-view penalties across these sections of the statutes," Kerkman wrote in a statement.

Countless other victims

Pleasant Prairie Police Chief David Smetana told the committee the victims were as young as 6 years old. While 47 victims were identified, there were countless other victims

who could not be identified in thousands of hours of footage captured by the perpetrators, he said.

Karl Landt, 37, of Waukegan, Ill., and Melissa Wenckebach, 28, of Pleasant Prairie, entered guilty pleas to 47 counts each, which came with the possibility of 70.5 years in prison.

Landt was given 12 years in prison, followed by 61 years of supervised release. He must also register as a sex offender. Wenckebach was

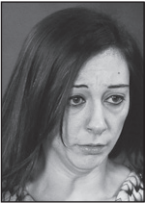
sentenced to six years in prison, followed by 12 years supervision. Wenckebach must also register as a sex offender registry and was given 15 years probation on charges for which sentencing was withheld due to a plea agreement.

The victim's mother clarified for committee members that although Wenckebach and Landt were charged with and convicted of multiple felony offenses, it was due to the number of victims, not their age.

Currently, taking photos or video of a nude or partially nude person in a locker room is a Class B Misdemeanor with a maximum penalty of \$1,000 fine or up to 90 days in jail or both. The penalty is the same for both adult and child victims.

Senate Bill 452 would increase those penalties to a Class A misdemeanor in cases with adult victims — \$10,000, up to 9 months, or both — and to a Class I felony when the victim is a child — \$10,000, up to 3.5 years, or both.

The Assembly companion bill, AB 566 is scheduled to be considered next week by the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.



Melissa Wenckebach



Karl J. Landt