



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. Box 7882 • Madison, WI 53707-7882

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NOTE: This column is being submitted for your consideration to print.

Bipartisan effort aims to protect survivors of domestic abuse, stalking, and human trafficking

By Senators Fitzgerald and Shilling and Representatives Kleefisch and Taylor

Imagine trying to pay a utility bill, sign a child up for school activities, or apply for a job if you are a survivor of domestic abuse, stalking, or human trafficking. When it comes time to list an address, the fear of being harassed—or worse—can be paralyzing.

While the four of us don't always agree, there is one thing we can all get behind; the safety of survivors of domestic abuse, stalking, and human trafficking. We are pleased to join a bipartisan group of nineteen Senators and forty-one Representatives who have introduced legislation to strengthen privacy rights and improve public safety.

The “Safe at Home” bill gives survivors and their families an opportunity to reengage in their communities and rebuild their lives by creating the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) Address Confidentiality Program which will add a layer of safety for survivors and their families.

Thirty-four states have already implemented similar programs, which provide at-risk families with needed protection. The program gives participants the opportunity to safely send and receive mail without divulging their location, giving them the security to pay utility bills, communicate with their child's school, and keep in touch with friends and relatives.

For survivors of domestic abuse, stalking, and human trafficking, safety is always a top concern as they work to rebuild their lives. However, these survivors are particularly vulnerable to continued violence and harassment, and many live in fear that their perpetrators will find them. By shielding their home address after a move and providing safety planning through the DOJ, this initiative will help alleviate that fear.

The most dangerous time for a domestic violence survivor is the period immediately after they leave their abuser, and many domestic violence-related murders occur after the survivor has fled. This bill aims to prevent these heartbreaking scenarios by establishing a system through which survivors could create a safety plan and transition into the address confidentiality program after leaving their abuser or relocating.

The “Safe at Home” bill will add Wisconsin to the lengthy list of states that already provide residents with this protection and it is our sincere hope that this program will vastly improve the lives of survivors and their families in our state.

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