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# PATRICK SNYDER

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 85<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 825: Sara's Law

Good morning Chairwoman Rodriguez and members of the Assembly Committee on Family Law. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today on Assembly Bill 825.

March 22, 2017 will forever be remembered as a day of tragedy for the Wausau community. On this day, four innocent individuals lost their lives in three separate but connected shootings- Dianne Look, Karen Barclay, Detective Jason Weiland, and Sara Quirt Sann. We always and forever remember all four victims, but today we specifically are here to honor Sara.

Sara was a divorce attorney who at the time represented the gunman's estranged wife. It was a long, drawn-out case filled with heightened emotions and conflict. The shooter was angry about the divorce and because of Sara's professional role in this situation, she unfortunately was a victim to this unspeakable tragedy.

Our community was devastated. In response, local leaders teamed up to form a group that attempts to build "A Safe Community for All." The group is known as Wausau Metro Strong and many of its leaders are here to testify before you today.

Last June, several members of the newly formed organization contacted both Senator Petrowski and me about legislative action they would like to see pursued at the state level. Over the past few months, we have worked closely together to get to the final product that you have in front of you today.

Assembly Bill 825 makes it a Class H felony to intentionally cause bodily harm or threaten to cause bodily harm to a guardian ad litem, corporation counsel, or an attorney when they are acting in their official capacity in proceedings relating to family law. These protections are modeled after those already in place for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers, s. 940.203. Similar heightened protections are also provided to DOR, DSPS, and DWD employees. Because of the emotional nature of the family and domestic cases these individuals work with daily, it is important we have the necessary protections and penalties in place for their safety.

Before you today are a number of advocates to speak to the benefits that increased protections would have on these professions. As a society, we should recognize the volatile situations corporation counsel, guardian ad litem, and attorneys, like Sara, often find themselves in and provide them with the necessary protections to make them feel safe in the workplace.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to take any questions at this time.



**STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN**

*Leaders in the Law. Advocates for Justice.®*

To: Members, Assembly Family Law Committee  
From: State Bar of Wisconsin  
Date: January 30, 2018  
Re: AB 825 – Battery of a Court Officer

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The State Bar of Wisconsin, having a longstanding position supporting continued resources to protect our courts, court personnel and individuals that access the courts, supports AB 825, Representative Snyder's legislation increasing the protections for guardian ad litem (GALs), corporation counsel, and family law practitioners.

Currently, it is a Class H felony to cause bodily harm or threaten to cause bodily harm to judges, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors. AB 825 would add GALs, corporation counsel and family law attorneys or their families to this classification.

This legislation attempts to correct an oversight in existing statute that was discovered after the tragic violence that occurred in March 2017 when a family law attorney was killed by her client's estranged husband. After this incident, attorneys, GALs, and corporate counsel recognized that their protections under current law were not as strong as those afforded to other officers of the court, and AB 825 corrects that oversight, as this group of court officers has the same, if not more, exposure to parties in family law cases.

The **State Bar of Wisconsin** believes the safety and protection our courts and court officers is vital to the judicial system, and as such, respectfully **requests members of the Assembly Family Law Committee support AB 825.**

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact the State Bar lobbyists, Cale Battles, [cbattles@wisbar.org](mailto:cbattles@wisbar.org) or (608) 695-5686, or Lynne Davis, [ldavis@wisbar.org](mailto:ldavis@wisbar.org) or (608) 852-3603.