

memo



To: Senator Roger Roth
Representative Rob Brooks
Members of Joint Legislative Council
Date: February 15, 2017
From: Chase Tarrier, Public Policy Coordinator
Re: Support for LRB-1263 and LRB-0982

End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin
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Dear Co-Chairs Brooks and Roth and all members of the Joint Legislative Council,

I am writing to lend End Domestic Abuse WI's support for two proposals that have come to you from the Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on Access to Civil Legal Services: LRB-1263 creating and Interagency Legal Aid Coordinating Council and LRB-0982 relating to Grant Money for Legal Aid. End Domestic Abuse WI is the statewide organization that represents local domestic abuse victim service providers and survivors.

Many victims who choose to leave their abusive partners immediately become enmeshed in the criminal and civil legal systems. In particular, family law continues to be a very difficult arena for victims. Abusive parents generally shift their focus to control of the children as a way to continue the terror and violence against their former partners after separation. Abusive parents are far more likely than non-abusive parents to fight for child custody, not pay child support, and to kidnap children. Most victims do not have the means to afford the high cost of attorneys to help them navigate the lengthy legal process. Access to affordable legal representation can mean the difference between a victim keeping or losing their children.

Because so much depends on the outcome of civil and family law actions, Wisconsin citizens, and victims of domestic violence in particular, need access to legal assistance. LRB-1263 and LRB-0982 will help survivors in many ways, including raising awareness about the role that legal aid plays in protecting survivors, especially low-income survivors, as well as increasing the coordination efforts of agencies and organizations serving similar populations. We at End Abuse recognize the fact that domestic violence does not exist in a vacuum, and often factors such as age, ability, employment status and many others compound the circumstances that keep victims vulnerable to control and abuse. These two bills will ensure that civil legal aid is recognized in Wisconsin as a critical part of ongoing efforts to protect all of our state's most vulnerable citizens, and will allow for the expansion of these services to the people who most need them, including survivors of domestic violence.

Passage of both bills will express Wisconsin's leadership and commitment to protecting victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, Wisconsin veterans, seniors and many others. We hope these bills will receive strong bi-partisan support, and would like to thank the council for its consideration.

If you have any questions about End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin's position on this issue, please contact End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin's Public Policy Coordinator, Chase Tarrier, at 608.237.3985 or chaset@endabusewi.org.