



JOEL KLEEFISCH

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 38TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 673: The Safe at Home Bill *Assembly Committee on Judiciary*

Thank you committee members for allowing me to testify today on Assembly Bill 673, or the Safe at Home Bill. This legislation is supported by the Department of Justice, Legal Action of Wisconsin and End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin.

Assembly Bill 673 creates an Address Confidentiality Program within the Department of Justice for survivors of domestic abuse, stalking and human trafficking. Currently, 34 other states have an Address Confidentiality Program and they have shown to greatly benefit survivors wishing to keep their residential address confidential.

Thousands of men and women are stalked every year. Thousands of children are trafficked every year, and even more individuals are the victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. These victims deserve the opportunity to start new lives after they have escaped from these circumstances.

Address confidentiality is a proactive approach to public safety. The Safe at Home bill will provide added protections for individuals who have been victimized in the past, but whose attacker still has the ability to track them down. Things as simple as registering kids for school, paying bills, or sending Christmas cards, can link a victim to a residential address, leading that perpetrator straight to them.

As a state we must do what we can to help victims of stalking, domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual assault start new lives and feel safe and secure while doing so. Once again, thank you for your time and consideration, I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time.



Testimony of Rep. Chris Taylor Assembly Bill 673

January 28, 2016

Chairman Ott and Members of the Assembly Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 673, also known as the “Safe at Home” bill, and for the opportunity to testify in favor of this absolutely critical legislation that will save lives. This legislation is offered by Senators Fitzgerald and Shilling, and myself and Representative Kleefisch. As you can see, this is one of the most bipartisan pieces of legislation before the Legislature this session.

We all know someone who has been a victim of domestic abuse, stalking or human trafficking. Indescribable fear and anxiety are a significant part of their daily lives which often continues even after leaving their abuser. In fact, oftentimes domestic violence escalates when a victim is preparing to leave, or has left, the relationship. In 2014, there were 36 domestic homicides in Wisconsin. The majority, or 57%, of victims of these homicides, involved intimate partners who were killed after the relationship ended or when one partner was taking steps to leave the relationship.

The Safe at Home bill helps victims protect their new address and makes sure it remains unknown to the abuser by creating an Address Confidentiality Program within the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The Safe at Home program would give survivors a substitute address to use for mailing, public records and a service of process. Administered by the DOJ, a person who is a victim, or a parent or guardian of a person who is a victim of certain acts of abuse, stalking or human trafficking may participate in the program and receive a PO Box that they can use to safely send and receive mail, service of process, pay utility bills, communicate with their children’s schools, and keep in touch with friends and relatives without ever divulging their actual addresses.

Wisconsin would be the 35th state, including our neighbors Iowa and Minnesota, to pass an address confidentiality program into state law. Red states, blue states and purple states throughout our country have adopted this type of program to protect victims of abuse and violence.

One of the most frequent questions I get asked is: how do you contain the cost and size of the program and will this snowball into everyone signing up for the program to protect their privacy? That hasn’t been an issue in the states that have adopted this program.

Iowa, whose program began earlier this year estimates that approximately 150 applicants will sign up for the program in the first six months. However, it's important to note that not all participants will stay enrolled in the program. After five years of operation, Minnesota had 1,200 active Safe at Home participants but had served more than 2200 Minnesota residents in that time. Over 1000 individuals exited the program in those five years. Some states, like Missouri, who serve about 3,000 Missourians every year, have had such success they are even looking to expand their program to serve more residents.

Further, this program has certain requirements that limits eligibility, and requires that the victim participate in formulating a safety plan with their DOJ liaison.

Our offices worked with Legal Action of Wisconsin, End Domestic Abuse, and the DOJ in formulating a Safe at Home program that would work for us here in Wisconsin.

This is a positive, proactive piece of public safety legislation that we all should be able to get behind. I truly hope that Wisconsin can move forward and become the 35th state to provide victims of domestic and sexual violence this additional layer of protection and safety.

Thank you for your consideration.



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

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

Senators Jennifer Shilling & Scott Fitzgerald

Testimony in Support of AB 673: Address Confidentiality Program

Assembly Committee on Judiciary

January 28, 2016

Good afternoon Chairman Ott and members of the committee. Thank you for holding a hearing on AB 673. We appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of this bill.

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

To help survivors of domestic abuse, stalking and human trafficking and their families reengage in their communities and rebuild their lives, we introduced SB 488 / AB 673. AB 673 creates the WI Department of Justice (DOJ) Address Confidentiality Program which would add a layer of safety for survivors and their families.

Currently, 34 states have similar programs which provide at-risk families with a needed layer of protection. The program gives participants the opportunity to safely send and receive mail without divulging their location, pay utility bills, communicate with their child's school, and keep in touch with friends and relatives.

By shielding their actual address after a move, and providing safety planning through DOJ, a person or family member affected by abuse, stalking or human trafficking, can move forward with their life with less concern that their perpetrator will find them.

For survivors of domestic abuse, stalking and human trafficking, safety is always a top concern as they rebuild their lives. However, these survivors are particularly vulnerable to continued violence and harassment and many survivors live in fear that their perpetrators will find them.

OVER

The most dangerous time for a domestic violence survivor is immediately after they leave their abuser and many domestic violence homicides occur after the survivor has left. This bill would establish a system where survivors would create a safety plan and enter into the address confidentiality program after leaving their abuser or relocating.

Many have asked how this program will work logistically. Under the program, DOJ would receive and process applications, print new address cards for survivors, and provide them with a mailing address. DOJ would then sort and forward first-class mail and accept service of process for enrollees. Participants would be able to list the alternate address on utility bills, government documentation, online shopping orders, etc.

In Minnesota, Xcel Energy and CenturyLink have been excellent partners with the program and have worked closely with the state to make sure the alternate address is accepted and that the addresses of participants remains off all documentation.

Our offices worked closely with Legal Action of Wisconsin, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, and DOJ on drafting this legislation.

We hope you will support the AB 673 which will add Wisconsin to the list of 34 states who already provide residents with this safety layer and will improve the lives of survivors and their families in Wisconsin.

Thank you.

testimony



To: Members of the Assembly Judiciary Committee
Date: January 28, 2016
From: Tony Gibart, Public Policy Director

Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence
1245 East Washington Avenue, Suite 150
Phone: (608) 255-0539 Fax: (608) 255-3560
tonyg@endabusewi.org

Chairman Ott and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 673, the Safe at Home Bill. I want to thank Senators Fitzgerald and Shilling and Representatives Kleefisch and Taylor for authoring this important bill. I also want to thank the Department of Justice and Attorney General Brad Schimel for assisting with the drafting of the bill. My name is Tony Gibart, and I am with End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin. We are the statewide voice for local domestic violence victim service providers and survivors in Wisconsin. Our members serve victims in all of the state's 72 counties and 11 tribes.

We fully support the Safe at Home Bill. With this legislation, Wisconsin will join the majority of states, which provide a mechanism for domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking survivors to obtain a confidential address to use in the place of their physical addresses. The bill will allow an individual who is in danger to apply for a confidential address with the state Department of Justice (DOJ). DOJ would keep these individuals' home addresses secret and be responsible for forwarding mail to those addresses.

While most victims of domestic violence will never need to take this step, some survivors of very severe stalking, abuse or harassment will never feel safe unless the individual who is threatening them is not allowed to know their whereabouts. At End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, we receive several calls from survivors each year who ask if they are able to obtain a confidential address in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, we have had to tell these survivors that public disclosure of their addresses may be unavoidable in Wisconsin because, unlike many states, we do not have an address confidentiality program in Wisconsin.

Survivors who are interested in address confidentiality typically have moved more than once to escape an abuser and have endured repeated upheavals in attempts simply to remain safe. One survivor described to me how her stalker followed her to two different states and that within months of moving he always appeared. The stress and anxiety of not knowing if or when a person who has threatened your life will be outside your door, of course, has enormous consequences on a victim's health and quality of life. Creating a system for confidential addresses will provide survivors in these very severe and high-risk cases peace of mind and an opportunity to live their lives free of an ever present and looming threat. More importantly, a Safe at Home program would potentially save lives because it would limit dangerous individuals' opportunity to commit acts of violence.

Before concluding, I would like to discuss a particular aspect of the bill. The legislation integrates safety planning with a survivor's enrollment in the program. Victim advocates at our local member programs will likely be involved in helping program participants develop these safety plans. Safety planning involves very practical things that victims can do to increase their chances of survival, such as changing the route they take to work and identifying trustworthy neighbors who know to call the police if the abusive person appears. Because having a confidential address does not guarantee that a determined batterer or stalker will not locate a victim, we believe it is wise to give survivors other strategies and tools to stay safe.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony. I want to again extend my thanks to the authors for bringing this legislation forward. I urge the committee to support the Safe at Home Bill.



To: Members, Assembly Committee on Judiciary

From: Vicky Selkove, Legislative Director, Legal Action of Wisconsin

Re: Assembly Bill 673, creating an Address Confidentiality Program to protect the confidentiality of addresses for victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking

Date: January 19, 2016

Legal Action of Wisconsin is a nonprofit law firm which provides free legal advice and representation to low-income residents in Wisconsin's 39 southern counties. Among the services we provide is assistance to survivors of domestic violence who are fleeing abusive relationships. Our clients need legal representation in order to obtain divorces, establish custody orders, and safely enforce child support.

We strongly support Assembly Bill 673; this legislation will create an important additional safety tool for many of our clients and their families. We appreciate the leadership of Representative Kleefisch, Representative Taylor, Senator Fitzgerald, and Senator Shilling in authoring this legislation.

Address Confidentiality Programs (ACPs) are a cost-effective and straightforward way to allow survivors of domestic violence, stalking, and human trafficking to keep their residential addresses confidential. ACPs give survivors a substitute address to use for mailing, public records, and service of process. At least 33 other states have implemented comprehensive ACPs.

Survivors of domestic violence and stalking are particularly vulnerable to continued violence and harassment. The most dangerous time for domestic violence survivors is immediately after they leave their abuser. More than 70% of domestic violence murders happen after the survivors have escaped. AB 673 will protect survivors by shielding their actual address after they move, allowing them to reengage in their communities and rebuild their lives. The creation of an ACP will allow Wisconsin survivors to safely register their children for school, pay their utility bills, keep in contact with friends and relatives, and assert their legal rights.

A recent Legal Action client's experience provides a good example of how ACPs work in other states, and how important it will be for Wisconsin survivors of domestic violence to have a similar program:

Jane was a Legal Action of Wisconsin client who fled from Wisconsin to Washington to escape an abusive husband. During her divorce proceedings, her husband attempted to gain access to Jane's new residential address in Washington. Jane was able to participate in the State of Washington's Address Confidentiality Program, so her new address was protected. She was able to give the court a safe, secure, and reliable address for service of process. She had a safe substitute address to use for her bills and mail forwarding. Because Jane's home address was secure, she didn't have to worry that her abusive husband would find her. The Address Confidentiality Program was an important piece of Jane's safety and peace of mind as she moved on from an abusive relationship.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on AB 673. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions. I can be reached at (608) 620-2011 or VSS@legalaction.org.

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

January 28, 2016

Dear Assembly Committee on Judiciary,

We strongly support Assembly Bill 673 and ask you to approve this important, bi-partisan bill.

The bill will protect the lives of domestic violence, abuse, sexual assault, stalking, and trafficking victims by ensuring their home, work, or school addresses are kept secret from those who have terrorized them before and may seek to do so again. These survivors are disproportionately women and girls. By allowing these survivors, and their parents and families, to live without fear that a former abuser can locate them, you are helping these women and girls and their families move on from their past and rebuild their lives. By supporting this bill, you are helping turn victims into survivors.

We especially applaud that the bill includes protection not only for those who were physically injured but also those who were threatened with harm. Thank you for recognizing that their fear is just as real and just as debilitating.

This bill also shows that the legislature, and the state of Wisconsin, trusts victims. AB 637 does not require a victim to win a conviction, obtain a restraining order, or even file a police report to have their address kept private.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 673. We urge you to vote yes. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Carousel Bayrd, our Policy and Partnership Coordinator, at (608) 395-2196.

Sincerely,



Rachel Krinsky
CEO

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca

Race &
Gender Equity

Job Training &
Transportation

Housing &
Shelter

YWCA Madison

101 E. Mifflin Street, Suite 100 | Madison | WI 53703

P 608.257.1436

F 608.257.1439

ywcamadison.org