



Joy Goeben

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 5th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Committee on Judiciary

Representative Goeben
May 7, 2025

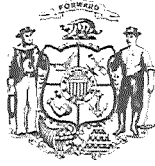
Good Afternoon Chairman Tusler, Vice Chair Jacobson and members of the committee for the opportunity to share with you about the great things we're doing to protect victims and help law enforcement today.

Assembly Bill 124, coauthored by Senator Wanggaard, seeks to close a loophole in disallowing persons convicted of a violent crime from legally changing their name, thereby protecting victims from continued abuse and violence. A provision already exists in our state statutes disallowing persons convicted of sexual assault to change their name. This provision exists to ensure the offender isn't violating a restraining order or any other court order.

The ability of individuals convicted of violent crimes to legally change their names presents a serious risk to public safety. Name changes can allow offenders to evade detection, making it more difficult for law enforcement and the public to track individuals with a history of violent offenses. This loophole can also traumatize victims, who may struggle to stay informed about the whereabouts and identities of their perpetrators. It is essential in maintaining public trust and safety that those convicted of serious crimes cannot easily alter their identities.

This bill closes that loophole by expanding the name-change prohibition to include all individuals convicted of violent crimes using existing law as a criteria to determine which convicted offenders would fall under the new prohibition. WI 2023 Act 3 As we heard in the Senate hearing last week, some of the crimes listed in the original bill included misdemeanors. We felt upon further consideration, it might be more prudent to limit that list of offenses to felonies. Assembly Amendment 1 (AA1) to AB 124 narrows the list of offenses further in response to the testimony shared in the Senate committee.

Again, I would like to thank the chair for hearing this bill today. It is my sincere belief we can work together to pass this bill to benefit our communities.



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

Testimony on Assembly Bill 124

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and committee members, for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill 124.

Imagine, having a neighbor move in next door with a name you don't know, only to find out that the neighbor was a criminal who changed his or her name, and had previously victimized your family. Assembly Bill 124 prohibits a person convicted of a violent crime, as defined by 2023 Act 3, or Wis. Stat. 969.001(3), from changing his or her name.

Most people don't know that current law already prohibits sex offenders on the sex offender registry from changing his or her name. That law has been on the books for decades. But, a sex trafficker, or a murderer, a domestic abuser, kidnapper, or stalker can change their name at will.

Imagine marrying John Smith, only to find out he was previously domestic abuser Jim Johnson, but he had changed his name. The crimes are similar, the penalties and sentencing are similar, but the ability to change your name is different. This makes it more difficult for law enforcement and victims to track individuals, and can lead to further trauma for victims.

Assembly Bill 124 is a common-sense bill that closes this loophole to protect crime victims and help law enforcement, and it deserves your support. Thank you.

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State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882 • (608) 266-1832 • Toll-free (866) 615-7510
E-Mail: Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wi.gov • SenatorWanggaard.com

May 7, 2025

Chair Tusler, Vice-Chair Jacobson, and Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Judiciary:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Assembly Bill 124.

Assembly Bill 124 would create a lifetime ban on legal name changes for all Wisconsinites convicted of one of the ninety-seven enumerated offenses deemed a “violent crime” under Wis. Stat. § 969.001(3)(a). People in this category who change their name would be criminally charged with a Class H Felony punishable by a fine not to exceed \$10,000 or imprisonment not to exceed 6 years, or both.

This proposal would treat anyone with one of these convictions—no matter how many decades have passed since the date of the offense—as a permanent threat to the community, regardless of any individual circumstances or progress since the time of the conviction. For some, the act of changing their name could result in the same or greater length of incarceration than the “violent crime” itself. That’s absurd.

This approach fails to serve public safety by denying individuals the basic dignity of shaping their own identity and making it harder for people to rebuild stable lives after incarceration. Particularly concerning is the impact AB-124 would have on some of the most vulnerable Wisconsinites at risk of violence themselves: people who are survivors of abuse and transgender people. Even if a person was convicted as a teenager, has served their time, lived lawfully for decades, or is trying to escape trauma or danger, the law leaves no room for discretion or nuance.

An overwhelming majority of women facing incarceration at some point in their lives are survivors of domestic abuse—some studies estimate between 74% and 95% of incarcerated women have survived domestic abuse or sexual violence. AB-124 would force someone to retain the last name of their abuser following a divorce.

For many transgender people, a legal name change is essential to navigate the world without fear of being outed every time legal identification is required. Trans people are over four times more likely than cisgender people to experience violent victimization, including rape, sexual assault, and aggravated or simple assault.

The ability to change your name implicates fundamental aspects of humanity, self-expression, and identity formation. A conviction should not deny Wisconsinites the safety and dignity a legal name change affords.



May 7, 2025

To: Chairman Tusler and Members of the Assembly Committee on Judiciary

From: Pat Mitchell, Chief, West Allis Police Department, Co-Chair WCPA Legislative Committee

Re: Support Assembly Bill 124, Prohibiting violent offenders from changing their name

Chairman Tusler and committee members, thank you for agreeing to hold a hearing on this important bill. I also want to thank Representative Goeben and Senator Wanggaard for introducing this bill.

The Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association is proud to support Assembly Bill 124 on behalf of its members across Wisconsin.

This bill aims to enhance public safety and transparency by preventing offenders from evading accountability through name changes.

Current Wisconsin statutes prohibit registered sex offenders from changing their names.

Victims of the violent crimes outlined in this proposal, including homicide, battery, kidnapping, stalking, human trafficking, and sexual assault, should be afforded the same opportunity to be further protected from their perpetrators should they attempt to change their name.

Allowing offenders convicted of these violent crimes to change their name and obfuscate their identity could negatively impact public safety, victim safety, and future law enforcement investigations.

The Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association always looks for ways to enhance public safety, and Assembly Bill 124 would accomplish just that.



Wisconsin State Lodge *Fraternal Order of Police*



PO Box 206 West Bend, WI 53095

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Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 124 **Assembly Committee on Judiciary**

May 7, 2025

Chair Tusler, Vice Chair Jacobson, and esteemed members of the Assembly Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Mark Sette, and I am the Vice President of the Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police. The Fraternal Order of Police is the world's largest organization of sworn law enforcement officers, with over 379,000 members in more than 2,200 lodges. The Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police proudly represents more than 3,600 members in 33 lodges throughout the state. Thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of our members in support of Assembly Bill 124, which prohibits individuals convicted of violent crimes from changing their names.

Assembly Bill 124 addresses a critical public safety concern by preventing those convicted of violent crimes—such as homicide, battery, kidnapping, stalking, human trafficking, and sexual assault—from altering their identities through name changes. This measure strengthens accountability and protects communities by ensuring that individuals with a history of violent offenses cannot obscure their past, which could otherwise enable further harm or evasion of justice.

Under current Wisconsin law, only registered sex offenders are prohibited from changing their names during their registration period, as outlined in s. 301.47. Assembly Bill 124 extends similar restrictions to those convicted of violent crimes, recognizing that such individuals pose significant risks to public safety. This bill ensures that name changes are explicitly prohibited for these offenders, whether through administrative processes, court petitions, or other legal mechanisms.

The need for this legislation is clear. Allowing individuals convicted of violent crimes to change their names creates opportunities for them to conceal their criminal history, potentially undermining victim safety, law enforcement efforts, and community trust. For example, a person convicted of homicide or human trafficking could relocate and assume a new identity, making it difficult for authorities or the public to track their whereabouts or recognize their past offenses. This loophole poses an unacceptable risk, particularly for victims who may live in fear of retaliation or encounter their perpetrators unknowingly. Moreover, Assembly Bill 124 aligns with Wisconsin's commitment to transparency and accountability in the justice system. The Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police believes this measure is a necessary step to enhance public safety and support the work of law enforcement in protecting our communities.

The Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police respectfully urges the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety to support and advance Senate Bill 146. This legislation will close a dangerous gap, protect our communities, and uphold the integrity of Wisconsin's justice system. Thank you for your consideration.