



Date: January 3, 2024

To: Chairman Wanggaard and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

From: Janet L. Zander, Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator

Re: **Support for SB 516** – expediting criminal proceedings when a victim or witness is an elder person and preserving the testimony of a crime victim or witness who is an elder person.

Thank you for this opportunity to share testimony on SB 516. My name is Janet Zander and I serve as the Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator for the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc. (GWAAR). GWAAR is a nonprofit agency committed to supporting the successful delivery of aging programs and services in our service area consisting of 70 counties (all but Dane and Milwaukee) and 11 tribes in Wisconsin. We are one of three area agencies on aging (AAAs) in Wisconsin. We provide lead aging agencies in our service area with training, technical assistance, and advocacy to ensure the availability and quality of programs and services to meet the changing needs of older people in Wisconsin. Our mission is to deliver innovative support to lead aging agencies as we work together to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of older people in Wisconsin. There are over one million adults aged 60 and older residing in our service area. **GWAAR provides several other services in addition to its role as an AAA, including operation of the state’s Elder Abuse Hotline Program. As of October 2023, the Elder Abuse Hotline is projecting a call volume for the year of over 1600, which represents nearly a 65% increase in calls over 2022.**

The number of reported elder abuse cases in the state continues to rise, increasing by nearly 81% percent from 2009¹ to 2022 when there were 9,621 reported cases.² The actual number of elder abuse cases is likely much higher, as fear and embarrassment lead to underreporting of abuse. According to the U.S. Department of Justice more than 1 in 10 Americans aged 65 and older experience some form of elder abuse in a given year.³

The consequences of elder abuse can be devastating, placing abused elders at increased risk of hospitalization, nursing home admission, and even death. Given the significant negative impacts of elder abuse and the amount of stress placed on elder victims and witnesses, **GWAAR supports SB 516** which requires courts to expedite criminal proceedings in cases involving a victim or witness

¹ Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Volume 29, Issue 2; <https://www.endabusewi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Chronicles-29-2.pdf>

² Wisconsin’s Annual Elder Abuse and Neglect Report: 2022, Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Retrieved on January 2, 2024 from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00124.pdf>.

³ About Elder Abuse, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved on January 2, 2024 from <https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/about-elder-abuse>.

who is 60 years of age or older and provides an opportunity to preserve testimony through a video-taped court hearing. Recording the testimony in a timely manner preserves the older victim's/witness's testimony in case of illness, later incompetency or even death. Under the bill an older witness, if there is good cause, may even provide testimony into the record of the hearing by telephone or live audiovisual means, thereby minimizing any further negative impacts on the older adult's health, independence, and dignity.

We appreciate the interest in and efforts of policy makers to protect older adults against elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation and to address this growing problem. We look forward to continuing to work with you on policies that improve the quality of life of older people in Wisconsin.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments supporting SB 516.

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