



News Release
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Elder Rights Project Expands Statewide to Help Victims of Abuse

Legal Action of Wisconsin is pleased to announce that through a partnership with Wisconsin Judicare, the Elder Rights Project will provide statewide civil legal aid to elder abuse victims, age 60 and over, regardless of income. The project is funded through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA victim assistance grants are provided to private and public agencies to support direct services to victims of crime.

According to recent estimates, up to 27,000 elder abuse victims in Wisconsin had no access to civil legal services.

“As part of a coalition of providers throughout the state, we found that Wisconsin’s elder abuse victims were facing critical civil legal problems, with virtually no legal services available to solve them,” said ERP Director Nicole Zimmer. “The gap was too dangerous to ignore: Civil legal problems affect elder abuse victims’ safety, physical/mental health, and their overall quality of life. But with the help of a lawyer, these elders can get to safety, access health care, and stabilize their lives.”

The ERP will help address the large gap in Wisconsin’s crime victim services system, as seniors increasingly find themselves targets of financial exploitation and physical/emotional abuse. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) reported that 6,347 reports of elder abuse were made in 2014, a 95 percent increase from 2001. It is also estimated that for each case reported, five remain unreported—and our state’s elderly pay the price.

“Elder abuse does not discriminate. It happens to men. It happens to women. City dwellers and rural citizens are at risk, and more often than not, the abuse occurs in the home at the hands of a perpetrator the victim knows and trusts,” said Zimmer. “The Elder Rights Project now has attorneys stationed in both rural and urban communities to help with the legal fallout of abuse.”

The legal problems that stem from elder abuse can be severe. Elder abuse survivors can find themselves facing eviction, needing help in obtaining injunctions against their abusers, and working to repair their credit and recoup money, property or other assets that were stolen by abusers through exploitation or identity theft. Attorney advocates can provide critical assistance with these issues. Attorneys can also protect elders’ rights by locating trusted, non-abusive caregivers to step in and provide ongoing support and assistance to the elder when needed.

“Depending on their age and health, elder abuse victims may be facing physical and mental limitations that make tackling complex legal issues virtually impossible, especially when they’re up against an abuser who has scared and intimidated them. We are proud to bring them free legal services, provided by attorneys who have in-depth knowledge of victimization, trauma, and the impact diminished capacity can have on a case,” said Zimmer.

Potential clients are encouraged to call the statewide toll-free Elder Abuse Intake Line at 844-614-5468.

Established in 1968, Legal Action of Wisconsin (Legal Action) is a non-profit law firm that ensures equal justice. With offices in six cities, Legal Action serves 39 southern Wisconsin counties. The Elder Rights Project provides free civil legal services to victims of elder abuse, helping victims become safe and independent, stabilize their lives, and meet their emotional and physical needs by resolving their critical civil legal problems. For more information, visit www.legalaction.org.



Legal Action has added several new staff to expand representation. These advocates are now representing elderly clients at each Legal Action location, including:

Legal Action-Milwaukee

(414) 278-7722

Attorney Chris Donahoe

Attorney Matt Plummer (focusing on Waukesha County)

Attorney Benita Scott-Anderson

Legal Action-Madison

(608) 256-3304

Attorney Lauren Hamvas

Attorney Sam Wegleitner

Legal Action-Green Bay

(920) 432-4645

Attorney Andrea Gage

Paralegal Jolene Umentum

Legal Action-Oshkosh

(920) 233-6521

Attorney Kristina Ebbott

Legal Action-La Crosse

(608) 785-2809

Attorney Nikki Swayne

Legal Action-Racine

(262) 635-8836

Attorney Andrea Rufo

Legal Action staff is also actively engaged in educating the public on the devastating impact of elder abuse, and how we can work together as a community to combat the problem. Community groups and civic organizations that are interested in joining the effort should contact Nicole Zimmer at 414-278-7722.

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