



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 13, 2018
CONTACT: Chase Tarrier, Public Policy Coordinator
End Domestic Abuse WI
chaset@endabusewi.org, 608.237.3985

Victim Advocates Call on State Senate to Reject Proposal for New \$350 Million Prison

Madison - Advocates for victims of domestic violence in Wisconsin are speaking out in opposition to a proposal that would dramatically increase the population of prisons across the state in addition to earmarking over \$350 million of state funds to build a new prison. Coming just weeks after the passage of several harmful proposals to restrict social safety net services, victim advocates see the bill as a shocking example of misguided priorities in the legislature.

"On any given day, over 200 domestic violence victims and their kids are struggling to find a safe shelter as they flee abuse," said Patti Seger, Executive Director of End Domestic Abuse WI. "How can we tell survivors in this state that we do not have the resources to provide them with a safe place to sleep, but we have hundreds of millions of dollars to create and house new prisoners?"

The proposal, Senate Bill 54 (SB 54), would require the Department of Corrections (DOC) to recommend revoking a person's extended supervision, parole, or probation if the person is charged with any new crime, regardless of the severity or whether they are eventually found innocent. The State Assembly passed SB 54 on a party line vote with an amendment to provide funding for a new prison facility.

"The fact that some legislators are so committed to fiscal prudence when it comes to programs like FoodShare and Medicaid but are willing to pay any amount to dramatically increase the prison population is incredibly disheartening," continued Seger. "If lawmakers are committed to protecting people from violence, they should invest in services like the Emergency Assistance program, which was cut by 17% in the previous budget and helps low-income survivors find housing in times of crisis, they should implement dating violence curricula in our local schools to break cycles of abuse and they should reform our justice system to implement trauma-informed practices that empower victims to assume control of their lives. Survivors in Wisconsin don't need a new prison, they need elected officials who respond to their actual needs."

SB 54, including the amendment to fund a new prison, has not yet passed in the Senate. With one day of voting left in this legislative session, advocates are urging the Senate to abandon SB 54 and instead pass bills that would help victims stay safe like Senate Bill 476, which would offer additional protections for victims who work in the legal system, and Assembly Bills 115 and 116, which would expand access to civil legal aid.

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