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## **Domestic Violence Advocates Call on Joint Finance Committee to Support Legal Aid for Victims**

**Madison** — Today, advocates for victims of domestic violence around Wisconsin are calling on members of the state’s Joint Finance Committee to vote in favor of continuing funding for civil legal aid in the state budget. This critical service allows low-income victims to work with an attorney while seeking access to affordable housing, protecting their children in family court and other critical matters. The funding, established during the 2015-17 budget process, was set to be phased out this summer. The JFC must now vote on whether to eliminate the funding or expand it in the current biennium.

Wisconsin advocates are calling on the committee to support an alternative motion authored by Senator Alberta Darling (R - River Hills). The motion, which would direct the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to provide \$2.5 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding annually (an increase from \$500,000 annually) to the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WTAF) in order to disseminate grants of up to \$100,000 (up from \$75,000 in the 2015-17 budget) to eligible grantees, is supported by End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Access to Justice Commission, the State Bar of Wisconsin, Disability Rights Wisconsin, WI Judicare, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Centro Legal, and the Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee.

“The 2015 budget put Wisconsin on a path toward ensuring equal access to justice for all Wisconsinites, not just for those who can afford it. Now it is incumbent upon us to build on this progress and expand efforts to help more individuals address the civil legal problems that stand in the way of their independence, economic stability and safety.” said Patti Seger, Executive Director of End Domestic Abuse WI. “The importance of these services for victims in all communities cannot be overstated. Whether seeking employment, resolving housing issues or advocating for their children, having access to legal aid is paramount to a victim’s ability to protect themselves and their children, especially while coping with extreme trauma, as is so often the case.

“Governor Walker’s proposal to allow this funding stream to be phased out would be a major step backwards for Wisconsin victims,” continued Seger. “End Abuse and member programs across the state call on the Joint Finance Committee to recognize the importance of civil legal aid for victims of domestic violence, veterans, low-income families and many others, and support Senator Darling’s motion to continue and expand funding for legal aid.”

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*End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence is the leading voice for victims of domestic abuse in Wisconsin. At End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, we educate shelter and program volunteers and advocates, law enforcement, legislators, and community members to provide safety and support to survivors. We strive to shift Wisconsin from the attitudes and beliefs that cause domestic violence to values of mutual respect and equality, and we partner with communities in the effort to prevent and end domestic abuse. We encourage reporters to include the National Domestic Violence Hotline number [1-800-799-SAFE(7233)] in their stories for victims who need help. A list of local Wisconsin domestic violence victim service providers can be found at <http://www.endabusewi.org>.*