



JERRY PETROWSKI

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Senator Petrowski Testimony
Senate Bill 694: Sara's Law
Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on Senate Bill 694.

The need for this bill came to the forefront in our community on March 22, 2017, when a party to a divorce action took the lives of four innocent individuals - Dianne Look, Karen Barclay, Detective Jason Weiland and Attorney Sara Quirt Sann. We always and forever remember all four victims, but today we specifically are here to honor Sara.

Sara was a divorce attorney who at the time represented the gunman's estranged wife. It was a long, drawn-out case filled with heightened emotions and conflict. The shooter was angry about the divorce and because of Sara's professional role in this situation, she unfortunately was one of the victims of this unspeakable tragedy.

Out of the devastation rose a community group known as Wausau Metro Strong with the goal to build "A Safe Community for All." The Legislative Action subcommittee of the group made it one of their first goals to see legislation passed that would increase the criminal penalty for threats and battery against Attorneys like Sara. As an author of this bill I am deeply honored to testify in its favor and sincerely hope that this legislation will serve as a strong deterrent against future acts of violence like the one that rocked our community last year.

Senate Bill 694 makes it a Class H felony to intentionally cause, or threaten to cause, bodily harm to a guardian ad litem, corporation counsel, or attorney in relation to their professional role in proceedings affecting the family, including actions under the children's and juvenile codes, restraining orders, guardianships and protective placements. Our statutes already provide this protection to judges, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, witnesses as well as DOR and DSPS employees. Extending this heightened protection to those who practice in family law is important due to the often highly emotional and volatile nature of such cases.

Family law attorneys, GALs and corporation counsel who handle these types of cases are deserving of inclusion in the class of officials already expressly mentioned in Wisconsin Statutes. Since they deal daily and repetitively with emotional family and domestic cases, there is a significant need for additional protections against battery and threats. Indeed, you will hear testimony today that will clearly illustrate what a pervasive problem these types of threats have become for family law practitioners, like Sara.

29TH SENATE DISTRICT



PATRICK SNYDER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 85th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 694: Sara's Law

Good afternoon Chairman Wanggaard and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today on Senate Bill 694.

March 22, 2017 will forever be remembered as a day of tragedy for the Wausau community. On this day, four innocent individuals lost their lives in three separate but connected shootings- Dianne Look, Karen Barclay, Detective Jason Weiland, and Sara Quirt Sann. We always and forever remember all four victims, but today we specifically are here to honor Sara.

Sara was a divorce attorney who at the time represented the gunman's estranged wife. It was a long, drawn-out case filled with heightened emotions and conflict. The shooter was angry about the divorce and because of Sara's professional role in this situation, she unfortunately was a victim to this unspeakable tragedy.

Our community was devastated. In response, local leaders teamed up to form a group that attempts to build "A Safe Community for All." The group is known as Wausau Metro Strong and many of its leaders are here to testify before you today.

Last June, several members of the newly formed organization contacted both Senator Petrowski and me about legislative action they would like to see pursued at the state level. Over the past few months, we have worked closely together to get to the final product that you have in front of you today.

Senate Bill 694 makes it a Class H felony to intentionally cause bodily harm or threaten to cause bodily harm to a guardian ad litem, corporation counsel, or an attorney when they are acting in their official capacity in proceedings relating to family law. These protections are modeled after those already in place for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers, s. 940.203. Similar heightened protections are also provided to DOR, DSPS, and DWD employees. Because of the emotional nature of the family and domestic cases these individuals work with daily, it is important we have the necessary protections and penalties in place for their safety.

As a society, we should recognize the volatile situations corporation counsel, guardian ad litem, and attorneys, like Sara, often find themselves in and provide them with the necessary protections to make them feel safe in the workplace.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to take any questions at this time.



STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN

Leaders in the Law. Advocates for Justice.®

To: Members, Senate Judiciary & Public Safety Committee

From: State Bar of Wisconsin

Date: February 6, 2018

Re: SB 694 – Battery of a Court Officer

The State Bar of Wisconsin, having a longstanding position supporting continued resources to protect our courts, court personnel and individuals that access the courts, supports SB 694, Senator Petrowski's legislation increasing the protections for guardian ad litem (GALs), corporation counsel, and family law practitioners.

Currently, it is a Class H felony to cause bodily harm or threaten to cause bodily harm to judges, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors. SB 694 would add GALs, corporation counsel and family law attorneys or their families to this classification.

This legislation attempts to correct an oversight in existing statute that was discovered after the tragic violence that occurred in March 2017 when a family law attorney was killed by her client's estranged husband. After this incident, attorneys, GALs, and corporate counsel recognized that their protections under current law were not as strong as those afforded to other officers of the court, and SB 694 corrects that oversight, as this group of court officers has the same, if not more, exposure to parties in family law cases.

The **State Bar of Wisconsin** believes the safety and protection our courts and court officers is vital to the judicial system, and as such, respectfully **requests members of the Senate Judiciary Committee support SB 694.**

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact the State Bar lobbyists, Cale Battles, cbattles@wisbar.org or (608) 695-5686, or Lynne Davis, ldavis@wisbar.org or (608) 852-3603.