



Date: January 22, 2020

To: Chair Wanggaard, Vice-Chair Jacque, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

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

Re: **Support for SB 427** – increased penalties for crimes against elder persons; restraining order for elder persons; freezing assets of a defendant charged with financial exploitation of an elder person; sexual assault of an elder person; physical abuse of an elder person; and providing a penalty.

The Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc. (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 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 age 60 and older residing in our service area.

Thank you for this opportunity to share testimony on SB 427. The number of reported elder abuse cases in the state continues to rise, increasing by 52 percent from 2010 to 2018 when there were 8,803 reported cases. The actual number of elder abuse cases is likely much higher, as fear and embarrassment lead to underreporting of abuse. According to the American Bar Association approximately 10% of older adults experience some form of elder abuse (2017).

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, we support SB 427 which increases the penalties for crimes against older people. We also support the bill's proposal to freeze or seize assets from a defendant who has been charged with a financial exploitation crime against an older adult. Too often victims of elder financial exploitation are unable to recoup their financial losses, freezing or seizing assets from the defendant may help victims to receive the restitution they deserve. Additionally, we support changes made in this bill to allow an older adult seeking a domestic violence, individual-at-risk, or harassment restraining order to appear in court by phone or live-video, thereby minimizing any further negative impacts on the victim'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 427.

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