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"Cindy's Law" bill would help track domestic abusers

By Jake Miller

For the Wausau Daily Herald

A local state representative is sponsoring a bipartisan bill that would allow courts to make repeat domestic abusers wear a satellite tracking device.

Rep. Scott Suder's office helped draft "Cindy's Law," which would apply to repeat offenders who violate restraining orders.

"The intent is to give victims an immediate alert anytime an abuser violates their protective order," said Suder, R-Abbotsford.

The law is named after Cindy Bischof, an Illinois woman who was killed by her ex-boyfriend in March 2008.

Victims would carry a pager, cell phone or an issued radio device to warn them that the offender is within a prohibited space, Suder said. Several states, including Illinois and Minnesota, have passed similar laws.

Wisconsin has a system in place to track the most dangerous sex offenders, and Suder thinks the state could contract with its call center to monitor domestic abuse criminals.

In a time of major budget reform and a looming deficit, Suder said it's key that the perpetrators pay for the devices and any other costs. The cost to equip one person with the tracking system is estimated at about \$200, he said.

Pam Travis of Neillsville is a cousin of Bischof, who, along with her extended family, has pushed state lawmakers across the country to pass the bill. She originally approached Suder with the idea at the 2008 Clark County Fair.

"It's just one more safety net, one more barrier," Travis said. "It doesn't cost anything to the taxpayers, so why not give one more thing for the victims."

She said Bischof had many means to protect herself, including cameras she installed outside her home. But nothing, along with the restraining order, was enough to prevent her death.

Illinois' bill, the Cindy Bischof Act, passed with 100 percent approval within five months of being drafted, and Suder said he doesn't expect much pushback from Wisconsin lawmakers.

"If someone wants to challenge it," he said, "bring it on."

Additional Facts

Recent domestic violence homicides

- On Jan. 3, Robin Dunwoody, 39, of Schofield was shot and killed outside Wausau Manor in Wausau, where she worked. Her ex-boyfriend Walter Lassa, 54, of Dewey is charged with first-degree intentional homicide.
 - On June 23, 2008, Scott Nehls, 43, stabbed his fiancée, Diane Goulet, 19 times and then took his own life at their Weston home.
 - On Jan. 10, 2008, Ricky Weinfurter, 23, shot and killed his father's 37-year-old fiancée, Janet Nachtrab, 37, and then shot and killed himself at their Wausau apartment.
 - On Sept. 18, 2007, Debra Thewes, 39, of Kronenwetter shot and killed her 11-year-old son, Bryce Thewes, before killing herself, according to police. Officers were trying to resolve a child custody dispute between the boy's father and mother when the shooting occurred at her home.
 - On Aug. 28, 2007, Chor Thao, 31, of Weston stabbed to death his estranged wife, Pa Houa Thao, 25, and her unborn child. He then killed himself, according to police.
 - On April 15, 2007, Marc Tishim, 54, of Marshfield shot his daughter, Caiden, 8, in the head and killed his son, Darien, 4, with a drug overdose. Before killing himself, he notified police and left a message on his estranged wife's cell phone.
 - On Sept. 13, 2006, Chor Xiong, 39, shot and killed his estranged wife, Padelina Thao of Weston, before committing suicide.
 - On March 24, 2006, June Zurkowski, 40, of Spencer was beaten and strangled with a piece of broken glass stuffed down her throat by her husband, Patrick Zurkowski, 40. He was found guilty of first-degree intentional homicide and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.
 - Nov. 12, 2005, Christine Rudy, 21, was shot to death in Clark County and dismembered by her husband, Shaun Rudy, 23. Her unborn son also died. Rudy received two life sentences without the chance of parole.
 - Aug. 2, 2005, Jerry Anderson, 74, was shot in the head by his wife, Agnes Anderson, 75, in Portage County; she then committed suicide by shooting herself in the head.
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