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[00:00:13] **Speaker 1** All right. Can you all hear us? Okay. All right. Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Attorney General Josh Kaul, and I am proud to be joined today by state Senator Cal, the Roys state Representative Lisa Su back, Dane County Sheriff Calvin Barrett, Monique Mickens, the executive director of End Abuse. And thank you to everybody else who is joining us here as well. We are here today to announce proposed legislation to help keep Wisconsinites safe. The background of this legislation is rooted in a court case from 2022 called Do Back versus Call. In that case, the state Supreme Court issued a decision that held that under applying federal law to state law circumstances, individuals who were convicted of a domestic disorderly conduct case involving domestic violence were not prohibited from possessing a firearm in Wisconsin. So as a result of that decision, individuals who been convicted for a crime that involved domestic violence are able to obtain firearms. I believe and I know the overwhelming majority of Wisconsinites believe, that individuals who have committed domestic violence and been convicted based on their conduct should not have access to firearms. In fact, the data is clear that when domestic violence and access to firearms are linked, the dangerousness of the situation increases dramatically. In some instances, access to a firearm can make a difference between whether a domestic violence case results in somebody's death or not. So this is a critical proposal for public safety. Nobody should have to fear for their safety at home. They certainly shouldn't have to fear for their lives. The legislation that we are proposing today will make very minor changes to two statutes, the result of which will be, to be clear when somebody is convicted, that their disorderly conduct conviction involved domestic violence. When that happens, and we'll begin by making clear that the crime that the person has been convicted of did involve domestic violence. That will allow the courts to prohibit those individuals from possessing firearms. Now, Justice Crosbie issued a concurring opinion in that case. I mentioned do back versus call. In her concurrence, she was clear that this result was nonsensical and that it was dangerous. But she made the point that we needed legislative action to fix this issue. That's exactly what this proposal would do. It would close the new loophole in Wisconsin law and ensure that individuals who have committed domestic violence are prohibited from possessing firearms. But we need legislative action. The proposal we have here is very narrow in scope. It would bring us to where Wisconsin law had been understood to be prior to that decision in back. So we're not asking the legislature to expand restrictions that are in place. We're asking for us to go back to where we were prior to that decision in 2022. By doing that, we can help keep survivors of domestic violence safe and we can help keep our communities in Wisconsin safe. So with that, I'm going to turn over to State Senator Kelly Royce.

[00:03:36] **Speaker 2** Thank you. We are very lucky in Wisconsin to have an attorney general who is not only a champion for victims of crime, but specifically for victims of domestic violence. I really appreciate his leadership on this issue in 2022. 96 Wisconsinites died from domestic violence. That's one death less than every four days. In fact, one in six domestic violence homicides in this country happen in Wisconsin. The economic cost of domestic violence in Wisconsin is estimated at $657 million. Homicide is the leading cause of death for pregnant women in this country. And we know that a woman is five times more likely to be murdered if her partner has access to a gun. Now, these are horrifying statistics. They should stop you in your tracks. But it's easy to cite statistics and have that obscured the reality that every single individual who is a victim of domestic violence is a person whose life was cut short, taken away because their abuser wanted to keep access to their guns. That person had hopes and dreams and struggles just like the rest of us. Their life matters and that human being is one who leaves behind many other victims their children, their family, their community. All of us are harmed when victims of domestic violence are not protected. And the legislation today is simple and straightforward, but absolutely clear eyed in the mission to make sure that Wisconsin does not allow people who are victimized by domestic violence to be victimized by a partner with a firearm that should have been taken away. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to my assembly colleague, Representative Lisa Stupak. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Rice. And thank you to Attorney General Powell for all of your work on this. This is an incredibly important issue and one that we've talked about for a long time. I had the pleasure of serving for a number of years on the Governor's Council on Domestic Violence. And as part of that council, every year, we would hold a ceremony where we read out loud one at a time the names of individuals who are killed at the hands of a domestic abuser here in Wisconsin. And I can remember the first time I did that, I was astounded by the numbers. I had no idea. And I was more astounded to think about how many of those deaths were preventable. We know, as Senator Rice said, if a if an individual has access to firearms in a domestic violence situation, it is five times more likely to end in homicide. It is vital that we get guns out of the hands of abusers. The domestic abuse you'll be hearing from shortly issues a report every year about homicides by domestic violence in 2022. They told us that 88% of homicides by domestic violence were done with a firearm. Imagine if those abusers didn't have access to firearms. How the results could have been different to the lives that could have been saved. The law that we propose as attorney general calls that is quite simple. It redefines domestic violence to include or defines domestic violence, to include the nature of the relationship. And it separates violent conduct from other disorderly conduct under our law in order to create a court record under which the federal law can be enforced. It is already illegal for individuals who have been convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence to possess a firearm. But because our state law is not clear, as we saw in do back versus Castle, we are leaving firearms in the hands of abusers and as a result, individuals are dying. Women are dying at the hands of their abusers. We can change laws. This is a really simple fix. I'm pleased that we are introducing it today. I am hopeful that we can spark interest among my colleagues in order to get this done. This is the least that we can do to keep families and our communities safe. Thank you. And with that, I would like to introduce Dane County Sheriff Kathleen Barrett.

[00:08:15] **Speaker 3** Well, good afternoon. I would first like to thank Attorney General Carl, Senator Royce and Representative Sue Beck for this legislation that gets to the root cause of the violence that we see in our communities. So many times, law enforcement agencies like the Dade County Sheriff's Office were forced to respond after violence and after crimes have been committed. But by taking these preventative steps with the legislation, it gets to the root cause of the issues that leads to less contact on the back end and less violence on the back end when we get involved. Public safety, accountability and rehabilitation is the goal, and that's what this legislation allows us to maintain because we have to have accountability. Without accountability, it's very difficult to have rehabilitation. The root cost solutions to preventing future crimes and the leadership of our state and the leadership of our representatives and senators proposing this legislation are playing a huge role in keeping our communities safe. Local data here in Dade County from January 1st of 2023 to October 31st of 2023, we had 1788 bookings on domestic related charges in Dade County alone. Policies and practices that focus on disrupting access to firearms in times of crisis have been proven to reduce tragedies from firearms. Two thirds of women killed by an intimate partner are killed with a gun. This legislation is imperative to interrupting the cycles of violence that negatively affect victims, survivors, their children and our overall community. This legislation plays a significant role in law enforcement's ability to keep and maintain the peace in our communities. And I would like to thank Attorney General Carl, Senator Royce and Representative Sue Beck for their proactive work on this legislation because it is helping keep our communities safe. Thank you. Next, I would like to call Monique Meekins, the executive director of interviews.

[00:10:28] **Speaker 2** Good afternoon, everyone. I'm on the programs. The executive director of Don't Mess the Good news, Wisconsin. For those of you who are familiar with our coalition, with our coalition, you know that advocacy related to firearm is far from a new aspect of our work. Domestic violence and firearms are a lethal combination. Victims are five times more likely to be murdered when their abusers have access to a gun. Abusers often use guns to coerce, threaten and to terrorize partners, children and pets. Even without firing a single shot, this crisis of domestic homicide in our state is tied to the national crisis of gun violence. There is an undeniable link between mass shootings and DV. As a black woman, I stand here knowing that these issues deeply impact folks who look like me. Those who are black, indigenous and other people of color face multiple forms of violence at disproportionate rates. While anyone can experience DV, it is often more lethal for women of color, particularly when guns are involved. We have advocated for common sense legislation that centers schools, those most at risk of DV homicide for many years. And our public policy advocacy and via our annual DV homicide reports, we highlight deaths by homicide and related trends. We have offered consistent, reliable data to back what harms us as advocates. DV Homicide is a public safety crisis in our state, exacerbated by abusers access to guns. And our last report, we show that in 96, people in Wisconsin lost their lives to domestic violence in 2020 to the high. That's the highest total since we began releasing data in 2000. Those lost were ages 1 to 92, and the homicides occurred in 25 counties across the state. 63 of the homicides included a firearm. This year, data shows the same pattern. Firearms are most common homicide methods without action that addresses root causes of this crisis. Wisconsin, which is sixth in the country of DV concerning baby homicides, will continue to see lives lost at the hands of DV homicide. This bill is a step towards saving lives by ensuring that those who have been convicted of this a misdemeanor crime, a DV, does not have access to firearms. No. I'd like to share with you today something that is not unrelated to my professional life, but which I do not often share because of its personal nature and my own family's life. In recounting it, I ask that all in this room with us today, regardless of political affiliation, age, race, gender or class. Pause to remember what's most important. That we are talking about people and preserving human life. 40 years ago, my sister was living in Illinois with her three children, trying to move on with her life after filing for divorce. It was after midnight when her estranged husband kicked in the door to her house. My sisters, daughters, two and three years old and another niece, age three, witnessed the incident. My sister's husband shot her boyfriend who was sitting at the kitchen table. He shot him three times with the gun in his hand and insinuating harm. He forced my sister and the four children into the car. He drove them to his mother's house, leaving my sister's boyfriend on the floor. The boyfriend managed to get in his car and drove to our house to tell us what had happened. My other sister drove the boyfriend to the hospital and he thankfully survived the incident. To this day, she still has one of the bullets in his body. Later that day. My parents went to where my sister and her children work to give them to safety. Only my one niece left the house with my parents. My sister and her three children remained in the house with their abuser, though my sister assured us that the mother that his mother and sisters were also at the house. And while we have always worried about her safety, knowing he had a gun and leaving without her only intensified her fears. And even though the gun was not visible, the early morning events served as a warning to obey for my sister. Of course, when someone goes to the hospital with a gunshot. The police are contacted. Later that afternoon, the police knocked on our door. My parents sent them to the house where my sister was located. They had hoped my brother in law would be arrested and that my sister and her children would join us at home. Instead, his family did not cooperate with the police and they protected him. So an hour later, our phone rang. On the other on the other end was my sister's abuser, yelling at my momma for sending a police to his mother's house. We were so afraid for the life of my sister and her children. I am thankful to this day that everyone made it out of this horrific situation in life. They were lucky in this respect, which as our decade of homicide reports show. That's not always the case. And as for far too many victims, it's not the case as children who witnessed such violence. My nieces have been impacted. What happens remains in the consciousness of my family and continues to drive my work here at the state coalition. And I got permission from my sister to share this story, and I thank her for trusting me to share it with you all and to tell her story. Those impacted by domestic violence. DV Homicide. Our relatives or friends, coworkers, neighbors. They are home three dimensional people who face struggles, experience joys, and have hopes for their in their children's futures. What we decide in this capital building impacts whether people across Wisconsin will die at the hands of abusers with a gun with guns. We work for conditions that support survivors, hopes for futures where they and their children thrive. We work for those in our communities, families and hope in homes where people deserve dignity, safety and lives free from all too often lethal torment of domestic violence. It is through legislation like this, alongside broader work to address root causes of oppression that we move our state towards a more just future. And I turn it over to Attorney General Colin Powell.

[00:18:46] **Speaker 1** Thank you so much, Monique. Thank you. Also, Sheriff Barrett. State Representative Sue Beck and State Senator Royce. This is a proactive step we can take to prevent violence from happening and keep our community safer. And I hope that the legislature acts quickly to consider this legislation so that we're happy to open up to questions.

[00:19:07] **Speaker 4** Do you need Republicans on board with the legislation?

[00:19:10] **Speaker 1** They haven't so far had conversations with Republicans, though. You know, the legislators have. Please jump in. Clearly, we will work with any Republican legislators who are willing to consider taking this up. You know, we will learn soon whether the legislature schedules a hearing. So I think that will be a key first step. And I would add that I think this is a real test for Republicans in the legislature, because this is as simple and straightforward and commonsense a gun safety measure as you can imagine. This is about keeping firearms out of the hands of violent offenders. So my hope is that the legislature will recognize that and take common sense action. But, you know, obviously, there has not been a lot of progress on gun safety legislation over the last several years. So hopefully that will change.

[00:20:00] **Speaker 4** Given there has been a lot of Republican pushback against kind of similar legislation like red flag laws and such. A lot of Republicans of the very Second Amendment advocate very much advocating for the Second Amendment. Do me a message for any of those who might push back against this bill?

[00:20:17] **Speaker 1** Well, first, this is there was actually a court in front of the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the Second Amendment's applicability to domestic violence offenses. And I think it's, you know, we we don't have a ruling yet, but I believe the court will uphold those prohibitions and find that they're consistent with the Second Amendment. And again, this is this is about people who have been convicted of violent conduct and preventing them from having access to firearms. That's something that Democrats and Republicans broadly agree upon. And I'm hopeful that that we will see the legislature take action based on that. And I will actually one of the thing I learned this this was what everybody understood the law to be. Prior to a year ago. And, you know, and federal law prohibits people convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence from possessing a firearms. What what the statutory changes would do is make clear when the convictions are for that offense. So this is about bringing clarity of the law and ensuring that federal law can be enforced. Okay. All right. Thank you all for being here. Thank you.