

Elder Rights Project

Legal Action of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Judicare are pleased to announce that we will provide statewide civil legal aid to elder abuse victims through the Elder Rights Project (ERP). The Elder Rights project seeks to Help elder abuse victims in Wisconsin become safe and independent, stabilize their lives, and meet their emotional and physical needs by resolving their critical civil legal problems. Fees and fines imposed on criminals (through the Victims of Crime Act or VOCA) are making these civil legal aid lawyers for elder abuse victims possible.

“As part of a coalition of providers throughout the state, we found that Wisconsin’s elder abuse victims were facing critical civil legal problems, with virtually no legal services available to solve them,” said ERP Director Nicole Zimmer. “The gap was too dangerous to ignore: Civil legal problems affect elder abuse victims’ safety, physical/mental health, and their overall quality of life. But with the help of a lawyer, these elders can get to safety, access health care, and stabilize their lives.”

The ERP will help address the large gap in Wisconsin’s crime victim services system, as seniors increasingly find themselves targets of financial exploitation and physical/emotional abuse. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) reported that 6,347 reports of elder abuse were reported in 2014, a 95 percent increase from 2001. It is also estimated that for each case reported, five remain unreported—and our state’s elderly pay the price.

“Elder abuse does not discriminate. It happens to men. It happens to women. City dwellers and rural citizens are at risk, and more often than not, the abuse occurs in the home at the hands of a perpetrator the victim knows and trusts,” said Zimmer. “The Elder Rights Project now has attorneys stationed in both rural and urban communities to help with the legal fallout of abuse.”

The civil legal problems that stem from elder abuse can be severe. Civil legal aid attorneys at the ERP will protect elders’ rights by helping trusted, non-abusive representatives obtain conservatorships, guardianships, and powers of attorney. When appropriate, ERP attorneys can file Petitions to review the conduct of powers of attorney and seek revocation of abusive Powers of Attorney. Elder abuse survivors can find themselves facing eviction, needing help in obtaining injunctions against their abusers, and working to repair their credit and recoup money, property or other assets that were stolen by abusers through exploitation or identity theft. Attorney advocates can provide critical assistance with these issues.

“Depending on their age and health, elder abuse victims may be facing physical and mental limitations that make tackling complex legal issues virtually impossible, especially when they’re up against an abuser who has scared and intimidated them. We are proud to bring them free legal services, provided by attorneys who have in-depth knowledge of victimization, trauma, and the impact diminished capacity can have on a case,” said Zimmer.

The ERP has one statewide phone number for intakes and referrals: **844-614-5468**. People may also call the following attorneys at Legal Action of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Judicare for more information or to get civil legal aid for elder abuse victims age 60 and over (regardless of income):

Legal Action-Racine (262) 635-8836
Attorney Ann Rufo

ERP staff is also actively engaged in educating the public on the devastating impact of elder abuse, and how we can work together as a community to combat the problem. Community groups and civic organizations that are interested in joining the effort should contact ERP Director Nicole Zimmer at 414-278-7722.