

February 6, 2014

Wisconsin Supreme Court
Attention: Deputy Clerk-Rules
P.O. Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701-1688

Re: Petition 13-14 for amendment of SCR 60.04

Honorable Justices of the Wisconsin Supreme Court:

We are writing in support of petition 13-14 to amend Supreme Court Rule (SCR) 60.04 of the Wisconsin Code of Judicial Conduct.

Friends of Abused Families, Inc. (Friends) is the sole provider of domestic and sexual assault services in Washington County. In addition to emergency shelter, Friends provides individual counseling services, support groups, legal advocacy and representation, children's art therapy, community education, and a 24-hour crisis line. All services are provided confidentially and free of charge. Friends has been serving Washington County residents for over thirty-five years.

When victims first make contact with Friends, they are often at their lowest and most vulnerable point. Many times they are involved in multiple legal proceedings stemming from the abuse, whether it be a criminal case, family law matter, or injunction petition. Many victims cannot afford counsel and are forced to navigate the legal process on their own.

Unfortunately, the adversarial nature of the legal system offers little relief for victims. They will have to face the abuser on numerous occasions in the courtroom. They will have to testify about pain and suffering inflicted by the abuser. Many times, they must also be a voice for a child who has been subjected to physical and sexual abuse. They will be required to understand the legal process and accurately complete pleadings and submit evidence. They will need to communicate with the judge and know what to say and when.

Wisconsin Supreme Court
February 6, 2014
Page Two

Judges can alleviate some of these intimidating and traumatic experiences for victims through a facilitative approach. Asking clarifying questions, referring to available resources, and explaining expectations and the legal process in everyday language will help all parties to understand the proceedings. This will also ensure that the truth is not obscured due to a lack of legal knowledge.

Petition 13-14 provides assurance to judges that they can facilitate proceedings without compromising fairness or impartiality. It provides the opportunity for inquiry, clarification, explanation, and discussion. It recognizes that the courtroom is unfamiliar territory to most people. For these reasons, we respectfully support petition 13-14 to amend Supreme Court Rule 60.04 of the Wisconsin Code of Judicial Conduct.

Respectfully,

Courtney L. Meyer
Attorney

Lisa Krenke
Executive Director

Melissa Emberts
Legal Advocate