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PRESS RELEASE

WCASA disappointed in Act 37; Concerned about impact on victims

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Madison – On Friday July 5, Governor Scott Walker signed 2013 Act 37. This legislation requires a woman seeking an abortion to first obtain an ultrasound and also could force abortion clinics to close by placing significant restrictions on providers. “We are disappointed in this legislation and concerned about the impact on victims” said Pennie Meyers, Executive Director of WCASA. “The trauma of sexual assault is overwhelming and long-lasting. Restricting access to abortion is re-victimizing and impedes the long-term recovery of survivors.”

During the extremely quick manner in which this legislation was enacted, the topic of sexual assault featured prominently on several different occasions. WCASA would like to commend Rep. Mandy Wright, Senator Kathleen Vinehout, and other sexual assault survivors who lent their voices in opposition to this legislation. “The courage displayed by survivors telling their stories, some for the first time publicly, speaks to the importance of this issue for sexual assault” commented Pennie Meyers.

While this legislation contains an exception to the ultrasound requirements, this exception only applies to rapes reported to law enforcement. However, sexual assault is the most under-reported violent crime, with 65% of assaults not reported to law enforcement. “To avoid having an unnecessary and re-victimizing ultrasound, a victim must have reported the rape to law enforcement” stated Pennie Meyers. “Victims who have not reported to law enforcement will be forced to have an ultrasound – which only serves to remind them of the trauma caused by the perpetrator. “

WCASA believes that victims of sexual assault must be presented with the full range of medical and treatment options. With two clinics in Wisconsin facing closure as a result of this legislation, victims of rape who are pregnant as a result of the assault may face limited resources to explore their options. This may also lead a rape victim who becomes pregnant to either seek unregulated abortions closer to their home, or to carry their perpetrator’s child.

Sexual assault is about domination and exerting control over another person. Consequently, it is important to offer victims opportunities to regain that control by empowering them to make their own decisions. Restricting access to abortion and requiring procedures further limits the control victims have to make decisions after an assault.