

Wisconsin Defense Firm Highlights New Laws Expanding Criminal Liability for Grooming and Crimes Against At-Risk Adults

MADISON, WI, UNITED STATES, September 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Wisconsin enacted two significant criminal-law changes in 2026 that expand criminal liability and potential penalties in cases involving children and adults at risk. [Chirafisi Anderson, S.C.](#), a Wisconsin criminal defense law firm based in Madison, is drawing attention to the practical consequences of 2025 Wisconsin Acts 88 and 149 for individuals investigated or charged under the new laws.

Act 88 created a new standalone criminal offense for child grooming under Wis. Stat. § 948.072. The statute applies to a course of conduct, pattern of behavior, or series of acts undertaken with the intent to condition, seduce, solicit, lure, or entice a child to engage in sexual activity or certain conduct involving sexually explicit material.

The law establishes graduated felony penalties depending on the circumstances of the alleged conduct. Unlike offenses requiring proof that sexual contact or another completed sexual offense occurred, a grooming prosecution may focus heavily on the intent the State attributes to communications, interactions, and an alleged pattern of behavior.

"Act 88 is significant because prosecutors may focus on the alleged purpose behind a series of communications or interactions, even where no completed sexual offense is alleged," said David K. Anderson, managing partner of Chirafisi Anderson, S.C. "In those cases, the context of the communications, the nature of the relationship, and the evidence concerning intent can become especially important."

Wisconsin also enacted Act 149, which made several changes to criminal statutes involving adults at risk. Among other provisions, the law expands circumstances in which enhanced penalties may apply, modifies certain battery and sexual assault provisions, and provides additional procedures relating to financial exploitation allegations.

The changes can substantially increase the seriousness of criminal allegations when the alleged



victim qualifies as an adult at risk. In some applications of the new law, the prosecution must also address what the accused actually knew about the alleged victim's status or circumstances.

“An adult-at-risk designation can materially change the potential criminal exposure in a case,” Anderson said. “Where the statute requires actual knowledge, the analysis should not end simply because an alleged victim meets a statutory definition. What the accused actually knew may be a critical issue.”

Act 149 can also have consequences before a criminal case is resolved, including provisions allowing assets to be restrained in certain financial exploitation cases. Those procedures can create significant practical concerns for an accused person while the underlying allegations remain unresolved.

The enactment of Acts 88 and 149 reflects a broader expansion of Wisconsin criminal law in cases involving protected classes of alleged victims. At the same time, the new statutes create factual and legal issues that may require close analysis of statutory definitions, intent, knowledge, communications, and the circumstances surrounding the allegations.

Chirafisi Anderson, S.C. represents individuals in criminal investigations and prosecutions throughout Wisconsin, including serious felony, sex offense, violent crime, and other complex criminal matters.

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