



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

Colleagues,

Criminal justice reform has become a national, bi-partisan issue, with both federal and state-led initiatives resulting in reduced prison costs while maintaining public safety. To date, dozens of states have implemented bipartisan reforms. Two states, Texas and Michigan, have successfully engaged in bi-partisan criminal justice reform and can provide guidance to Wisconsin.

In Texas, beginning in 2007, the state legislature passed numerous changes that promoted the use of treatment over incarceration, promoted the use of graduated sanctions for individuals on supervision, and established investments in local alternatives and treatment options. The results are stunning. Recidivism rates and the general crime rate have dropped substantially. Texans also avoided spending over \$500 million to build new prisons and have realized hundreds of millions in savings, by closing eight prisons.

Michigan, a state with more similarities to Wisconsin than Texas, has had similar success. Facing a growing prison budget, Michigan passed reforms to reduce the length of incarceration for technical violations of supervision and invested heavily in treatment alternatives and re-entry programming. The overall crime rate, recidivism rates, and the total prison population have all decreased. Michigan has closed numerous correctional facilities, saving an estimated \$400 million from 2006-2016 due to the changes made through criminal justice reform.

The policies enacted in Texas and Michigan are not very different from one another. Using shorter, more immediate, and treatment focused interventions for individuals on community supervision reduces recidivism and reduces prison admissions. Wisconsin's supervision and revocation systems currently do not fully operate under this successful model and enacting similar changes in Wisconsin could have a positive impact on our prison population and recidivism rates.

Here in Wisconsin, the legislature has made several notable investments in our criminal justice system in the past few years. To name a few, we have expanded critical programs within our correctional facilities such as Windows to Work, Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (OARS), and Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies (IRES). We have encouraged DOC to use evidence-based trauma-informed care when dealing with inmates, and to partner with local technical colleges and community leaders to operate job centers in all of its minimum and medium security institutions. These programs have been helping inmates transition from life behind bars back to the real world with the skills and support they need to succeed.

Even with these investments, Wisconsin is not experiencing the savings that other states have because we lag behind the national trends in criminal justice reform. That is why Representative Goyke, Representative Schraa, Senator Taylor and I have been working with a broad array of stakeholders on both sides of the political spectrum to build upon our foundation of past investments and continue to move the needle here in Wisconsin. In the coming weeks, we will be

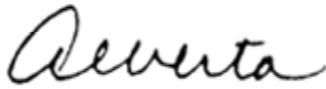
releasing a number of bills that address common sense reforms to better align Wisconsin with other states. These bills focus on policies that are proven to be safe and effective and will create savings for Wisconsin taxpayers.

Wisconsin is an outlier in many ways when it comes to the criminal justice system. Three areas that are ripe for reform and will be the focal point of our agenda this session are crimeless revocations, earned release, and extended supervision. Our bills will continue the trend of previous reforms backed by policies that have seen positive outcomes throughout our nation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this correspondence. I look forward to continuing the conversation of criminal justice reform in Wisconsin and hope to have your support as we move forward.

Please feel free to reach out to any of us if you would like to discuss the issue further.

Sincerely,



Senator Alberta Darling



Representative Evan Goyke



Senator Lena Taylor



Representative Michael Schraa