

EXCLUSIVE: Attempt By Some State Senate Republicans To Expunge Criminal Convictions Fails

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

An effort by moderate Republican Wisconsin state senators to this week pass a bill allowing judges to expunge the criminal convictions of potentially thousands of convicted criminals has failed because of lack of sufficient support in the GOP caucus.

Senate President Devin LeMahieu tells me the Senate will not vote on the bill this week, as originally planned, because the proposal lacks support in his caucus. The bill is supported by all Democrats and has overwhelming support in the more moderate state Assembly. The bill was placed on the tentative state Senate calendar for action Wednesday but was not included on the official calendar. LeMahieu is refusing to answer my questions over who put it on the temporary calendar in the first place.

Among the supporters of the measure are GOP Senators Van Wanggaard, Alberta Darling and most of the GOP Senators from northern Wisconsin. It has been opposed by a group of conservative Senators from southeast Wisconsin. The key Senators on the issue are Senate President Chris Kapenga and Brookfield Senator Dale Kooyenga, both of whom have opposed the measure in the past. At least one of them must have indicated to LeMahieu that he would again oppose the bill or it wouldn't have been removed from the calendar.

No one is talking publicly and there appears to be frustration among Senate leaders that I learned about the behind the scenes maneuvering.

The bill would allow judges to erase all records and expunge convictions of first time offenders convicted of so-called "non-violent" crimes. The category includes most auto thefts, several categories of sex crimes, home invasions and numerous other dangerous felonies. The measure has been supported by influential criminal justice reform groups but is adamantly opposed by law and order conservatives who think Wisconsin judges are soft enough as it is.

The measure keeps coming back every two years and this has been the closest it's gotten to passage. One of the key supporters of it is Patrick Testin, a northern Wisconsin Senator who is running for the GOP nomination for Lieutenant Governor and posing as a "conservative."

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