

EXPO of Wisconsin: Launches campaign to close Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility

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Milwaukee, WI - Hundreds of faith leaders, community advocates, and formerly incarcerated people gathered today at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) and then marched to the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF) to launch a campaign led by EX-Prisoners Organizing (EXPO) to close the prison. People incarcerated at MSDF are locked in their cells for 22 hours a day without access to outdoor recreation, denied in-person visits, and suffer routine abuses including extreme heat and poor ventilation, causing severe medical problems and even death. Many people subjected to these deplorable conditions have not been charged with new crimes but are at MSDF due to crimeless revocation - the practice of re-incarcerating people on probation, parole, and extended supervision for minor rule violations - or probation, parole, or extended supervision holds.

James Wilborn, who was an EXPO leader, died in MSDF during the summer of 2015. The extreme heat inside the facility was a factor in his death, as was his inability to obtain medications that he needed. With the launch of the campaign to close MSDF, EXPO called on Governor Walker to face the fact that crimeless revocation is a failed policy, a waste of money, and an embarrassment to Wisconsin.

The event included a panel discussion featuring EXPO members who have been incarcerated at MSDF, a premiere of a documentary by independent filmmaker Tim Coursen, remarks from Janos Marton of the New York City #CLOSErikers Campaign,

and a prayer vigil outside MSDF to honor those who have died in captivity there.

“During my stay in MSDF back in the early 2000s, I witnessed suicidal activity and a death due to faulty ventilation and lack of air conditioning in areas inmates were housed,” said **EXPO of Wisconsin Board Member William Harrell**. “The building wasn’t even one year old and had a mold problem in inmate shower areas while housing three people in cells designed for one person. This is inhumane treatment which has not been addressed in the nearly 20 year existence of the facility! This is cruel & unusual punishment, period!”

MSDF was built in 2001 as a temporary detention facility for people on parole, probation, and extended supervision who have allegedly committed violations in their rules of supervision. In the last 16 years, thousands of individuals, convicted of no new crime, have been re-incarcerated at MSDF—over sixty percent of them black men. This practice of “crimeless revocations” exacerbates racial inequities in Milwaukee and Wisconsin, and the inhumane conditions at MSDF violate basic human rights and defy our notions of justice and freedom.

“WISDOM supports the closing of MSDF because the facility is not suited for the housing nor the care for the citizens that are detained there,” said **WISDOM President Rev. Willie Brisco**. “The poor ventilation, the lack of adequate medical care for the mentally ill as well as the design that promotes sensory deprivation. We believe in humane treatment of all citizens within the state institution in order to promote safe and healthy communities.”

The #CloseMSDF Campaign aims not only to close this facility, but reimagine how Wisconsin invests in people caught in the criminal justice system. It asserts that MSDF is beyond reform and must be shuttered in order to build the stronger communities that Milwaukee and Wisconsin deserve. **EXPO of Wisconsin Board Member Charles Hampton** said, “conditions at Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF) are out of step with Wisconsin values. Not only have conditions at the prison been deplorable for years, but the very notion of locking up people struggling with parole and mental health issues is at odds with common sense approaches to justice.”

The #CloseMSDF campaign has been receiving support from JustLeadershipUSA in launching the campaign. JustLeadershipUSA is a national organization dedicated to cutting the US correctional population in half by 2030. It leads the #CLOSErikers campaign in New York City which successfully pushed Mayor de Blasio to commit to shuttering the notorious jail complex.

“The #CloseMSDF campaign is one that focuses on a local prison in Milwaukee, but has national implications,” said **Khalil Cumberbatch, Manager of Trainings at JustLeadershipUSA**. “As a country we are becoming more attuned to the factors that lead to our over-reliance on incarceration, the horrific conditions that exist in our jails and prisons, and the barriers that follow people after they are released, and we have people who have been through these experiences to thank for this new awareness. Now it is time to follow the lead of formerly incarcerated people in changing our failed criminal justice system and ensuring that it is transformed to align with our values of fairness and compassion. As an organization founded on the principle that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, JustLeadershipUSA is proud to build on the success of our #CLOSErikers campaign and support EX-Prisoners Organizing (EXPO) in launching their #CloseMSDF campaign.”