

# League of Women Voters: Letter to Gov. Evers regarding Department of Corrections Parole Commission

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Governor Tony Evers  
115 East, State Capitol  
Madison WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers:

The League of Women Voters was pleased with the support you expressed during the campaign for a bipartisan approach to comprehensive criminal justice reform. Kevin Carr, your new secretary of the Department of Corrections, echoed that sentiment in an interview with Wisconsin Public Radio. In fact, he said that your commitment to such reforms persuaded him to accept the position.

We are surprised and disappointed, therefore, at the lack of action concerning a basic element of the criminal justice system. The Wisconsin Parole Commission no longer has a chair. In order for the Commission to function and for eligible offenders to be released, a chairperson must be in place.

The Department of Corrections has about 3,000 offenders who were sentenced before the Truth in Sentencing law became effective in January, 2000. As part of the "old law" these prisoners are eligible for review and release. They must remain incarcerated, however, if a functioning Parole Commission does not exist to hear their appeals. The plight of these "old law" prisoners has been documented and publicized for several years. We hoped for speedy action by your new

administration.

A related issue concerns prisoners who might receive compassionate release on the grounds of age or illness if a Parole Commission were able to hear their cases. In 2015, nearly 20 percent of the prison population was over 50 years. Five percent were 60 years and older. Recidivism among these groups is low, but only nine prisoners received compassionate release during the three years ending in 2016.

We urge you to move quickly to appoint a qualified Parole Commission chairperson. Justice delayed can mean justice denied.

Sincerely,

Erin L Grunze  
Executive Director