

Rep. Kitchens: Supports criminal justice reform package

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MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) is putting his support behind a package of initiatives that is expected to improve various aspects of the state’s criminal justice system, from access to a fair trial to the re-entry of ex-offenders into the workforce.

“One of my top priorities as a legislator is to provide our law enforcement agencies and courts with the tools they need to ensure our neighborhoods are safe,” Kitchens said. “The proposals we announced this week will help accomplish that goal because they will allow for us to be tough, yet also smart on crime.”

Assembly Republicans are asking Gov. Tony Evers to include the following recommendations in his state budget request to the legislature:

- Quicker access to a fair trial: fund new assistant district attorney (ADA) positions, increase pay for ADAs and state public defenders (SPD) and increase private bar rate for county court appointments and SPD appointments
- Expand Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) programs to help offenders who suffer from alcohol and drug issues
- Invest in the retention of correctional officers
- Promote the successful transition of ex-offenders back into society through expanded worker training, reentry programs and health initiatives

The GOP Assembly reform package has already received the backing of numerous local district attorneys, public defenders, judges and members of law enforcement,

as well as the State Bar of Wisconsin.

State Bar President Christopher E. Rogers said it's encouraging to see support for, and recognition, that funding for the criminal justice system has to increase. He also stressed that he looks forward to working with all parties during the budget cycle and legislative session to ensure the passage of the reforms.

Gov. Evers is scheduled to deliver his budget address on Feb. 28.

"We are hoping that Gov. Evers sees the value in our criminal justice package and includes it in his budget request," Kitchens said. "While the governor has expressed that it is his goal to cut the prison population in half, that would result in violent criminals being released into our communities. I believe Republicans and Democrats need to come together and work toward improving the state's criminal justice system without needlessly putting our family, friends and neighbors in harm's way."