

# Rep. Ohnstad: Ohnstad and area legislators push for public notice on violent offender release

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MADISON – Today Representative Tod Ohnstad (D-Kenosha) announced that he will introduce bipartisan legislation to provide stronger public notice regarding the release of a person convicted of murder or certain other severe crimes, along with Senator Van Wanggaard (R-Racine) and Representatives Samantha Kerkman (R-Salem) and Tip McGuire (D-Kenosha).

While there are strict notification requirements under the law related to the release of a convicted sex offender, these conditions are not necessarily required for the release of a person convicted of other major crimes including homicide.

“When I read in the Kenosha News that a convicted murderer was being released into the community and that there is a disparity in the law regarding public notice for some of the most heinous crimes, I felt the need to take action,” Representative Ohnstad said. “That morning I began working with my staff to draft legislation that would address this issue.”

The legislation, which began circulating among legislators today for further support, intends to ensure the public is aware of the release of a murderer or severely violent offender in a manner similar to the types of notices that are provided during the process of the release of a sex offender.

Under the bill, the Department of Corrections, local police, and the local sheriff are required to provide public notice and identifying information about a person who will be released after incarceration for these most heinous crimes.

“We are starting the process by circulating this bill today, and I am hopeful something of this magnitude could be vetted through committee and signed into law in the current legislative session,” Ohnstad noted. “Most people would assume this sort of notification already exists. When we learned this was not the case, we wanted to address it immediately. Frankly, the public deserves to know.”

Decisions about release of murderers and other major offenders, particularly for crimes committed before 2000, fall to the Parole Commission, an independent board with decisions not directly approved by other officials.