

Rep. Petryk: Eau Claire area lawmakers call for criminal justice reforms in state budget

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EAU CLAIRE – State Representative Jesse James (R-Altoona) and Warren Petryk (R-Eleva) were joined by area law enforcement leaders today for a press conference to unveil a package of criminal justice initiatives aimed at improving the system from start to finish. Initiatives announced included enhanced funding to support area prosecutors and new investments in proven rehabilitation programs to improve successful reentry into the community and workforce.

“Our ultimate goal is to make our communities a safer place to live and work,” said Rep. James. “The reforms we’re calling for today make targeted investments to ensure that all citizens impacted by the criminal justice system are given access to a quicker, fair trial.”

Assembly Republicans made today’s announcement in a series of news conferences held around the state with local District Attorneys, judges and members of the law enforcement community. Locally, Representative James and Petryk were joined by Eau Claire County District Attorney Gary King, Eau Claire County Sheriff Ron Cramer and Lori Osberg, a regional attorney manager with the State Public Defender’s office.

“Simply put, calling for cutting the current prison population in half is unrealistic because it would mean releasing thousands of violent criminals into our communities that were sentenced under due process by a judge,” noted Petryk. “In

contrast, the plan we unveiled today is a more responsible path forward which builds upon our previous efforts to rehabilitate inmates and help them successfully transition back into the workforce.”

Specifically, the group requested that Governor Evers include the following initiatives in his forthcoming state budget request:

Ensure quicker access to a fair trial: fund new Assistant District Attorney (ADA) positions, increase pay for ADAs and State Public Defenders (SPD), 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; and
Promote the successful transition back into society through expanded worker training, reentry programs and health initiatives.
Governor Evers is expected to release his state budget plan in the coming weeks - delivering his budget address before the state legislature on Thursday, February 28th in Madison.