

Rep. Taylor: JFC Democrats highlight years of damage to Wisconsin prison system

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Contact: Senator Jon Erpenbach (608) 266-6670

Senator LaTonya Johnson (608) 266-2500

Representative Chris Taylor (608) 266-5342

Representative Evan Goyke (608) 266-0645

MADISON, WI – Today, Democrats on the Joint Finance Committee fought to improve the conditions and wages for workers at our correctional institutions in Wisconsin. After eight long years of neglect by Republicans, our criminal justice system is in disrepair. Democrats have long called for bipartisan solutions to fix our state's broken corrections system and improve conditions in facilities across the state. Democrats on the Joint Finance Committee are reaffirming their commitment to state workers by attempting to get to the roots of the worker shortages and low pay. They issued the following statements after Tuesday's budget deliberation:

“Our prison system is in a crisis situation due to Republican failures of the last eight years. It shouldn't be a surprise to anyone that when you have wages not keeping up with inflation and deteriorating working conditions, you're going to have a massive turnover rate like we're seeing in prisons across Wisconsin. The alarming vacancy rates at our maximum security facilities is also a direct result of not letting our workers have a voice in the conditions of their employment,” Representative Chris Taylor (D-Madison) stated. “We also need to acknowledge that our worker shortage is directly tied to high recidivism rates and an increasing prison population.”

In 2011, Republicans repealed Act 28 which included important recidivism programs

and community supports. Between 2009 and 2011, Wisconsin's prison population was actually going down. However, after former Governor Scott Walker took over in 2011, the number of incarcerated individuals began to rise again.

"For the past 8 years, corrections officers across Wisconsin have faced terrible working conditions because of the short-sighted, politics-first policies of the previous administration," said Senator Erpenbach (D-West Point). "Workers face 16-hour shifts, forced overtime and extreme staff turnover; these conditions are not sustainable or acceptable. That's why Democrats and Governor Evers put forth a plan to fix the mess created by the GOP, and support a wage increase and improved conditions for our hardworking correctional officers."

"There are obvious reforms that will reduce our prison population and create alternatives to incarceration, said Senator Johnson (D-Milwaukee). "We should be investing more in TAD programs and drug courts. We should stop incarcerating people for administrative infractions. And we should support Governor Evers' proposal to de-criminalize minor drug offenses. Democrats will continue championing these efforts and will work to create a forward-thinking corrections policies under the Evers Administration."

"For years, Gov. Walker swept the serious issues facing our corrections system under the rug by stopping independent reviews, declining to visit prisons, and stripping state workers of their rights. Now, Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee are attempting to take credit for fixing a problem they created. Righting these wrongs will be a long process, and we look forward to continue to work alongside the governor for a multifaceted solution to this complicated problem," said Representative Goyke (D-Milwaukee).