

Sen. Darling: State legislators unveil bipartisan “Expungement Reform: Pathways to Employment” bill

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Madison – On Tuesday, Senators Alberta Darling and Fred Risser and Representatives David Steffen and Evan Goyke unveiled legislation that provides pathways to employment for individuals through criminal justice reform.

“I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with this coalition to find bipartisan solutions for workforce shortage issues facing this state,” stated Rep. Steffen. “This legislation makes common-sense revisions to Wisconsin’s outdated expungement law and is an important step in connecting employers with potential employees.”

Expungement refers to a process where a person can petition to have his or her record expunged (or cleared) of a non-violent, lower-level offense. An individual is only eligible for expungement if they meet certain criteria. Currently, a judge can only order that an individual is eligible for expungement at the time of sentencing and it is only available to individuals under the age of 25. This bill would allow a judge to order that a record be expunged after a person completes his or her sentence, and removes the arbitrary age limit of 25.

“Wisconsin is on its 11th straight month of unemployment at 3% or less, our biggest

economic issue right now is that companies can't find employees for available jobs," Sen. Darling said. "We have hardworking people who can be dedicated employees, but don't have a chance at one of our many, many jobs because of a mistake made years ago. Our bill gives them another chance to support themselves and their families."

"This important legislation is the key to removing barriers to employment for so many Wisconsin citizens," said Rep. Goyke. "Over the past two years we have worked closely with numerous stakeholders, both in the courthouse and in the workforce, while also hearing from individuals and families throughout the state supporting this reform. Our bill moves Wisconsin's expungement law in line with most of the country by modernizing the court process for expungement, which will give a pathway to employment for thousands of Wisconsinites."

"Access to employment is key to ensuring individuals who have improved their lives will continue on the right path," added Sen. Risser. "This bill is a critical step to ensuring that a pathway to employment for individuals exists, which serves a direct benefit to both the applicant as well as employers throughout our state looking to fill vacancies."

The bill was circulated for co-sponsorship today and will be introduced in February.