

# Sen. Darling: Two criminal justice bills have public hearings

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*Darling Bills Help Protect Victims of Sex Trafficking, Stop Revolving Door of Prison*

Madison - Two important reforms authored by State Senator Alberta Darling are progressing in the Wisconsin State Senate. One measure will help protect victims of sex trafficking and the other will help people find work after they serve their time in prison. Both bills received public hearings on Wednesday in the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety.

The RISE (Reduce Incarceration, Secure Employment) Act would create a Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE) for ex-offenders who are not likely to pose a risk to public safety. Those with certain offenses, particularly those involving violent or sexual crimes, would not be eligible to apply under the bill. Regardless of the crime committed, the CQE would still not apply to certain facilities where our most vulnerable populations could be at risk, such as childcare centers or certain health care facilities. A CQE also does not apply to jobs substantially related to the applicant's crime.

Senate Bill 34, known as the RISE Act, will give people a second chance and give employers confidence in their new employees. Senator Darling says the bill will help prevent the revolving door of prison.

"Too often inmates learn new skills in prison, but aren't able to use them when they get out," Darling said, "The RISE Act will help make use of those in-demand skills."

Senate Bill 49, known as the Safe Harbor law, makes sure trafficked children won't

be charged for crimes they were forced to commit. Under current law, an individual who is under the age of 18 cannot legally consent to sexual relations. Despite that, minors who have been forced into having sexual relations because of trafficking can still be prosecuted for prostitution. Senator Darling says her bill updates state law to protect minors.

“This simple change to the law is vital to ensuring that children who have been sex trafficked are recognized as victims, not criminals,” Darling said, “Victims of sex trafficking have undergone incredible trauma that will affect them for the rest of their lives. Traffickers will no longer be able to use the threat of prosecution for prostitution as a way to keep children inside the cycle of abuse they undergo while being trafficked.”

After the public hearing, both bills are available for a vote from the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety. If the committee approves the bills, they would be available for a vote in front of the full State Senate.

Senator Darling represents portions of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha Counties.