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# Biden campaign: Local criminal justice reform leader highlights plan to create economic opportunity for formerly incarcerated

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In a recent Milwaukee Courier op-ed, local criminal justice reform leader Dr. Carl Wesley highlighted Joe Biden's plan to reform the criminal justice system and create economic opportunity for formerly incarcerated individuals to rebuild, find housing, earn a good living, and participate in democracy.

In Milwaukee, the Black incarceration rate is 10 times the white rate – and 2.5 times greater than it was 25 years ago.

Read more below:

**Milwaukee Courier Op-Ed**: Crime Prevention Starts with Economic Opportunity

I have dedicated my life to fighting for Milwaukee families to gain equitable access to the American dream. For many Black and brown families of Milwaukee this dream will remain on perpetual hold until there is sweeping policy driven criminal justice reform throughout the United States. The longer we wait to address the injustices that permeate our criminal justice system, the more we jeopardize the health, safety and economic viability of all of our communities.

Our work must prioritize addressing the economic and racial inequities deeply embedded in our institutions and those that operate them, especially the justice system.

In Milwaukee, the Black incarceration rate is 10 times the white rate – and 2.5 times

greater than it was 25 years ago. An overwhelming amount of those men and women are serving harsh sentences for nonviolent poverty crimes.

Following their release, those formerly incarcerated individuals face barriers to housing, employment, voting and more, extending punishment beyond the time they have already served. These barriers make it nearly impossible for someone to get back on their feet, and often puts people two steps behind instead of one step ahead. It doesn't have to be this way.

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris recognize the urgency of this moment – and they know that criminal justice reform is an economic and racial justice issue.

When Joe Biden worked as a public defender, he saw up close how the system is too often stacked against folks. He believes in second chances and knows how important it is to create opportunities for people to rebuild and fully integrate into society, earn a good living, and participate in democracy.

Joe will set a goal of ensuring 100% of formerly incarcerated individuals – at the state and local level – have housing upon their release. The Biden-Harris Administration will also eliminate barriers keeping formerly incarcerated individuals from accessing public assistance such as SNAP, Pell grants and housing support. They will expand access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment, as well as educational opportunities and job training for individuals during and after incarceration.

The current administration issued a few pardons to Black Americans and called it prison reform, meanwhile, they continue to support the long established and extremely punitive laws against non-violent activities such as marijuana usage. There are currently 40,000 individuals incarcerated for nonviolent marijuana related charges in the United States. Joe and Kamala would take the estimated billion dollars currently spent to keep these individuals incarcerated and apply it to substantive decriminalization and rehabilitation within prisons. In other words, Joe and Kamala will work to diminish incarcerations based on decades of racially-based laws and the enforcement of said laws.

Joe and Kamala will also expand on the Obama-Biden Administration's "ban the box" policy, which seeks to remove the criminal conviction question on job applications, and encourage further adoption of these policies at the state and local level. They will expedite the process for giving individuals on probation or parole for

nonviolent offenses access to Job Corps.

These policies and more under a Biden-Harris Administration will support a culture of redemption and rehabilitation for formerly incarcerated individuals by giving them a fair chance to rebuild.

Wisconsin needs leaders who will address the systemic inequities and put justice in criminal justice.

We need leaders who will build back an inclusive economy filled with opportunity for all to have a fair shot. We need leaders like Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

This election, the stakes couldn't be higher –– justice and our democracy are on the ballot. Head to iwillvote.com/WI and make a plan to vote, vote early, and get your friends to vote.