

# Hundreds rally at capitol to push criminal justice reform

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**MADISON** – More than three hundred individuals walked the halls of the Wisconsin State Capitol yesterday as part of the Smart Justice Lobby Day. The event was organized by the ACLU of Wisconsin's Campaign for Smart Justice, WISDOM, EXPO, and Just Leadership USA along with over twenty other organizations to bring together advocates and formerly incarcerated people from across the state.

"Yesterday was a powerful moment as our bipartisan coalition came together to speak out for an end to mass incarceration," said Chris Ott, executive director of the ACLU of Wisconsin. "Wisconsin's broken probation and parole system drives reincarceration rather than rehabilitation and causes people to be thrown back in prison for minor mistakes like missing an appointment or even starting a job without prior approval. No one should live one missed appointment away from a prison sentence or languish in a cage when they could be supporting their families and communities. The Wisconsin Legislature should be passing laws to help people rebuild their lives, not building new prisons."

"Incarceration costs Wisconsin taxpayers roughly \$1 billion a year as spending on corrections has far outpaced other budgetary priorities. This counterproductive and wasteful system weakens public safety by destabilizing families and making it harder for people who are released from prison to rebuild their lives. Instead of safer streets, our criminal justice system is fueling a vicious cycle of crime and incarceration," said Thomas Lyons, State Director of Wisconsin for Right on Crime.

Men and women who are directly impacted by the criminal justice system also met with Governor Tony Evers' staff to advocate for reforms to address Wisconsin's mass incarceration crisis and prevent people from being sent back to prison for minor mistakes like missing an appointment or taking a job without prior approval.

“The impact of my crimeless revocation traumatized my daughter mentally and emotionally,” said Lea Revels, a lobby day participant from Oshkosh. “One morning she woke up and discovered I was no longer there. I was not where she expected and needed me to be in her life. And the fact that I, who had not committed a new crime, could be unexpectedly removed from my daughter’s world has permanently changed my relationship with her and I cannot fix it. I do not want any other mother, father or child to go through that fear and trauma. This is why I fight to end the practice of crimeless revocations.”

The reforms being championed by advocates included:

- Expungement Reform (AB 33/SB 39) – Makes modest but important changes to the expungement process.
- Unlock the Vote (SB 348) – Restores the right to vote for people currently on parole or extended supervision.
- Crimeless Revocation (LRB 4356) – Prohibits technical or crimeless revocations for people with low level felony convictions.
- Anti-shackling of pregnant women (AB 398 / SB 316) – Would prohibit county jails from shackling women in labor.

Wisconsin’s prison population grew more than fivefold between 1980 and 2016, costing taxpayers more than \$1 billion annually. Today, more than 23,000 Wisconsinites are imprisoned, and when people on community supervision or in local jails are included the number increases to 1 in 45 adults. In 2017 alone, more than 3,000 Wisconsinites were sent back to prison for technical violations, accounting for 45 percent of all new admissions to state prisons, the largest such group who were incarcerated that year.