

Badger Institute: New Poll Reveals Overwhelming Support for Reforming State's Criminal Justice System

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Milwaukee — Ahead of a State Assembly hearing on [bipartisan expungement bill WI AB69](#), a new [poll](#) of Wisconsin voters released today by the **Badger Institute** reveals that a majority of Wisconsinites support reforming the state's expungement procedures. All told, 72% of Wisconsin voters, including 77% of Republicans and 70% of Democrats, support moving the decision of expungement eligibility to the completion of the sentence rather than at the time of sentencing. Further, voters showed overwhelming agreement that the criminal justice system should ensure people are less likely to commit another crime (70%) and should help people become productive, law-abiding citizens (86%). A strong majority also agree there are too many criminal laws on the books and that codes should be revised to be more transparent (58%).

The [new poll](#) was conducted by Robert Blizzard and Gene Ulm of Public Opinion Strategies, one of the nation's leading public opinion research firms. Bipartisan views on prisons, incarceration, and criminal justice from the poll's key findings include:

- A plurality believes the state's crime rate has increased over the past decade, and that there are too many people in prison in Wisconsin.
- By a wide margin, Wisconsin voters agree the state spends too much money on prisons and that is crowding out funding for other public safety priorities.
- After voters hear from both sides on prisons – those who believe the system is incarcerating too many people and spending too much on jails and prisons, and those who believe a person who commits a crime should be behind bars even if it costs a lot of money– Wisconsin voters side with more effective, less expensive alternatives by more than a two-to-one margin.
- Nearly three-quarters of Wisconsin voters support reforms to reduce reliance on one-size-fits all prison sentences.
- Nearly 80% of voters support sending fewer low risk, non-violent offenders to Wisconsin prisons so more money can be used to fund treatment and diversion programs.
- A majority of voters believe that terms of supervision should be reduced to help reduce the likelihood that a person commits another crime.

"These polling results are a revelation – especially when you look at the attitudes of Republicans. Three quarters of Wisconsin Republicans says what really matters is that the criminal justice system does a better job of making sure a person who gets out of prison is less likely to commit another crime. Over 80 percent of Republicans say the main goal of the criminal justice system should be rehabilitating people to become productive, law-abiding citizens," says Badger Institute President Mike Nichols.

"Maybe it's no surprise then that the strongest support for expungement reform comes from Republicans – 77 percent of whom are in favor. It's time to listen. Wisconsinites know expungement reform will help people find jobs and stability and that's good for everyone: employers, families, taxpayers and broader communities," continues Nichols.

These polling numbers from the Badger Institute, with support from the Justice Action Network, come as members of the Wisconsin legislature are considering proposals that would bring the state's expungement system in line with the rest of the country, incentivizing rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

On behalf the Badger Institute and the Justice Action Network, Public Opinion Strategies completed this survey of 500 registered voters in Wisconsin. Two hundred fifty respondents were contacted via landline and 250 via cell phone. The survey was conducted March 30-April 1, 2021 and has a margin of error of +/-4.38%.