

Sen. Wimberger, Rep. Wittke: Audit outlines improvements to community corrections program

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MADISON – The Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) released audit report [23-5](#), an evaluation of the community corrections program, administered by the Department of Corrections (DOC). The program oversees individuals who were convicted of crimes and reside in the community on probation, extended supervision, parole or mandatory release.

“This extensive review of the community corrections program by the LAB shows me that improvement is needed.” said Wittke. “LAB audit efforts included: 22 field office visits statewide, interviews with agents and supervisors, a survey of some 5,000 individuals under supervision, a review of 50 random case files and more. Today we have a valuable tool available to us. I hope the DOC takes this audit seriously to ensure the community corrections program is able to fulfill its statutory responsibility to rehabilitate individuals - including sex offenders - currently under supervision throughout the state and to keep residents safe in their communities.”

In January 2021, the DOC changed elements of the community corrections program related to risk assessments, program services, the severity of certain violations and violation consequences. The audit shows following those changes, the number of DOC agents reporting they felt violation consequences were appropriate dropped by 52.5%. Additionally, sheriffs surveyed during the audit indicated they felt the lack of consequences from not appropriately pursuing revocations is increasing the rate of recidivism.

“DOC Agents statewide are uniformly and significantly deviating from the model criminal risk assessments to warn courts at sentencing that the criminals they are working with are more dangerous than described on paper. Police also agree that dangerous criminals are too often being let out on the street,” said Wimberger. “All of this is happening while the DOC fails to include criminal acts leading to probation revocation in its recidivism statistics. Alarminglly the department only maintains program effectiveness data on approximately 20% of criminals in rehabilitative programming. The message is clear, the Evers Administration’s implementation of a soft on crime rehabilitative criminal justice model is failing.”

Report 23-5 also found that DOC has not complied with the statutory requirement to evaluate the effectiveness of consequences they impose on offender recidivism rates. The LAB made 27 recommendations to improve program administration and evaluation. Recommendations include examining the programmatic variances between each of the eight regions, tracking and evaluating the effectiveness of program services and developing a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the evidence-based response to violations project.

Copies of LAB’s report may be obtained from its website at www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lab or by calling (608) 266-2818. To report concerns related to state government activities, call LAB’s toll-free hotline at 1-877-FRAUD-17.