

Reps. Madison, Clancy: Ladies of SCI, Representatives Madison and Clancy introduce independent oversight of Wisconsin Corrections system through Office of Ombuds

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MADISON – Today, Representative Madison, along with Representatives Clancy, Senator Larson and other Democratic legislators introduced LRB 0554 which would create an Office of Ombudsperson for the state correctional system.

The Ombudsperson would accept complaints regarding facilities, abuse, unfair acts, and violations of rights of prisoners from prisoners in state adult and juvenile correctional facilities or under the supervision of community corrections. The Ombuds office will have the power to investigate complaints, make recommendations to facilities and the legislature, and may refer to proper authorities if criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be required.

The Ladies of SCI (ladies-of-sci.com/) are a bipartisan advocacy group for those that have a loved one who is incarcerated. Their mission is to spread awareness to people in our communities and to legislators, exposing the grim truths of incarceration, and advocating for desperately needed change. They have championed the fight to create an Ombuds office in Wisconsin.

The Ladies of SCI issued the following statement:

“We have been advocating for the creation of an Ombudsman office for over two years with lawmakers. The aging prison facilities in Wisconsin are currently 5,000

people over capacity and have a return rate of about 60%. The Department of Corrections has been in the news for multiple deaths and scandals. It is clear that our Corrections system is in a critical state.

Oversight offices have already been created in twenty states and at the Federal level. This office would give staff, family members, lawmakers, and citizens important resources to help change the trajectory of Corrections in Wisconsin. While we applaud the Department of Corrections for partnering with Falcon, a consulting company that provides oversight type assistance to corrections departments, we want to see lawmakers help the Department make a long-term investment in improving.

This can be done with the establishment of an Ombudsman that can address multiple system-wide issues and guide short- and long-term efforts to make Corrections more successful in Wisconsin. We urge lawmakers to bring this bill to a vote to give meaningful change to the 100,000 plus families that are affected by our corrections system.”

Representative Madison (D-10) issued the following statement:

“Wisconsin’s correctional system lacks real transparency because oversight remains internal. Without independent oversight there is no true accountability – which is why Wisconsin desperately needs a correctional ombudsperson.

An ombuds office is a critical human rights safeguard. It ensures people are heard, investigates complaints, and brings transparency to failures in medical care, living conditions, and staff conduct. It reduces conflict, prevents harm, and creates a system that is safer for everyone.

This Legislature already refused to move this critical legislation forward during the budget process and has now adjourned months early without seriously addressing the inhumane conditions in Wisconsin’s prisons. That is unacceptable.

The next Legislature must make independent oversight of the Department of Corrections a top priority because we cannot continue to ignore harm happening behind closed doors.”

Representative Clancy (D-10) issued the following statement:

“Wisconsin’s Corrections system has failed. As we confront the ongoing

consequences of this failure, we must also build effective, independent oversight of DOC facilities. Access and accountability should be bipartisan and uncontroversial, but right now advocates like the Ladies of SCI have to fight for both. Let's reward their hard work with meaningful change.

We also must address the well known problems with our carceral system, identified in our Conditions of Confinement package: unaffordable communications with loved ones, lack of access to sunshine and recreation, insulting and inadequate wages, use of solitary torture as punishment, and other urgent changes identified by those most impacted.

But that can't happen without transparency and accountability - an independent Ombuds office helps establish that baseline."