



# MICHAEL SCHRAA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 53RD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

Office: (608) 267-7990  
Toll-Free: (608) 534-0053  
Rep.Schraa@legis.wi.gov

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 183

Vice-Chair Bodden and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify additionally on Assembly Bill 183, which establishes a program to provide reentry services at one location.

While employment is essential for successful reentry, there are a number of factors that affect a person's ability to obtain and retain employment. This proposal would consolidate a number of services at one location to remove barriers for people who may be experiencing a type of culture shock as they reenter society.

A person cannot hold a job if he or she is not in good health. This center will provide staff to help persons find and access appropriate health care resources.

DOC makes a good effort in pre-release to obtain appropriate documentation, but this is not always possible. The center will assist in securing documents necessary for employment.

In today's world, a person needs a bank account for direct deposit of wages and a debit card for purchases. Assistance in obtaining these financial services will be provided.

Homelessness is an immense barrier to employment. The bill requires the center to provide information on emergency housing and contacts for landlords who might be willing to rent to them.

Not everyone who leaves prison has a job lined up. DWD has some outstanding Job Centers in prisons, and the community center will provide similar services.

Many inmates earn their High School Equivalency Diploma while incarcerated. Some earn vocational certification or even a baccalaureate degree in prison. Others are in need of education to achieve adequate employment. The center will provide help for each person to decide whether and how to continue education.

Probation and Parole Agents will be present to meet with individuals on Community Supervision.

Seven services is a lot to provide under one roof. Still, it is worth the effort

It will take a good deal of space and manpower to accomplish. That means funding, and Senator Felzkowski, who chaired the study committee, had the foresight to include \$4 million for the first year of this project. If it proves successful, there is the possible to expand to other locations in addition to the first one in Milwaukee County. Future funding will be addressed in future budgets. The bill requires data collection and reporting to assess whether or not the project is worthwhile.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Adam Procell, who brought this concept to the Study Committee. As he was presenting his idea, it was as if a lightbulb went off in my head. I believe that this innovative concept can have a significant effect on reducing recidivism and improving successful reentry.

Thank you for your time and attention. It will be my pleasure to respond to any questions you might have.



---

# MARY FELZKOWSKI

STATE SENATOR • 12<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

## Testimony for AB 183

Senator Mary Felzkowski

Committee on Corrections

October 3, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman Schraa and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 183, which will require the Department of Corrections to establish a Community Reentry Center under their purview.

Last session, a joint legislative study committee was formed with the purpose of reviewing impediments to employment and job training for individuals who are incarcerated or recently released. Through the exploration into this topic by the members of this committee, several paths to increasing offender employment opportunities were brought to light. One of these opportunities is the creation of a DOC Community Reentry Center that will serve as a 'one-stop shop' for recently released offenders to connect with services revolving around employment, health, education, and more.

When an offender is released from prison to begin the parole or community supervision part of their sentence, they are oftentimes released with little to no resources or guidance, leading many of them to struggle through their re-integration period, and more likely to put themselves in a situation where they re-offend and are re-incarcerated. A Reentry Center would be an all-in-one tool for both the parolees and their parole officers to access the resources needed for an individual to be set on the right track. This will eliminate the underestimated complications many released offenders face, such as not knowing how to get the ID required to pick up a prescription medication, or not having a bus pass in order to get to job interviews.

This bill will require the DOC to contract with at least one nonprofit organization, for-profit entity, or public agency to establish a community reentry center where initial, post-prison points of contact will be established for health services, identification services, financial services, housing services, employment services, education services, and DOC supervision services. This center must operate in a location that is easily accessible by public transportation and the population that it will serve, so it is the goal of the Study Committee and DOC to establish this facility in Milwaukee County, where the majority of offenders are released. Within the 2023-25 biennial state budget, \$4 million was set aside in JFC's supplemental appropriation account, to be released pending passage of this bill and on 13.10 request by the DOC once a plan for the facility is brought to the Finance Committee. Once the reentry center is established, DOC will be required to submit a biannual report examining the outcomes of services provide at the facility.

I am grateful to the vice-chair of the study committee, Rep. Schraa, for his work on this legislation, as well as the effort and input provided by Leg. Council and our fellow committee members. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.





WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**Shelia Stubbs**

77TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

October 2, 2023

Assembly Bill 183

Assembly Committee on Corrections

Good Morning, Chairman Representative Michael Schraa and Members of the Assembly Committee on Corrections. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify in Support of AB 183 relating to: establishing and operating community reentry center and making an appropriation.

I am in strong support of AB 183 not only because of my experience in corrections, but also because of the confidence I have that this bill will improve the lives of those previously incarcerated, their loved ones and the rest of our community. This bill requires the Department of Corrections to contract with at least one nonprofit organization, for-profit entity, or public agency to establish a community reentry center. This center will offer individuals who are being released from state correctional institutions initial points of contact for each of the following: health services, identification services, financial services, housing services, employment services, education services and supervision services.

The DOC is responsible for prioritizing the following: (1) collaborations with organizations providing service at the center, justice-involved individuals, criminal justice coordinating councils, technical colleges, and workforce investment boards; and (2) operating a center in counties with the highest number of individuals being release from incarceration to those counties. In this bill, the DOC is also responsible for creating a comprehensive report examining the outcomes of services provided at each center; the first report being in 2027 and every 2 years after.

The community organization in contract with the DOC is responsible for tracking and organizing data for services provided at their center, including the number and type of services provided and reported outcomes. This community reentry facility must also be in an easily accessible location by public transport. I have worked over 10 years planning and proposing a new criminal justice center in Dane County. Dane County is accessible with the Metro Transit and has already established adequate resources for those previously incarcerated. I believe this is a strong place to set a great example for future community reentry facilities across all of Wisconsin.

STATE CAPITOL / P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708

TELEPHONE / (608) 266-3784 TOLL FREE / (888) 534-0077 EMAIL / [rep.stubbs@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:rep.stubbs@legis.wisconsin.gov)

Having a physical space for those with a conviction record to gather support and resources is an incredible opportunity to form community and get back on their feet after serving time. When released from correctional facilities, inmates face countless barriers like scarce job opportunities, locating medical care and even finding a place to live. With a deeper connection to their community, these barriers can be diminished. These centers have the potential to reduce recidivism in Wisconsin, promote our workforce and improve the livelihoods of individuals trying to get better.

The facility not only benefits those previously incarcerated though. Typically, loved ones of the incarcerated individual are the ones advocating and supporting them through their incarceration and reentry process. With the support of the community reentry centers, family members and loved ones will have the opportunity to engage in their regular activities and give more autonomy to the ex-offender. In addition, this bill promotes our economy and communities by preparing more individuals to enter the workforce and giving them the right resources to remain healthy and on track for reintegration.

I believe this is one way how we can lead a better life of rehabilitation for offenders integrating back into their communities. With this in mind, I encourage you to vote yes for AB 183. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony on the importance of community reentry facilities. I close with a quote from Vice President Kamala Harris “we need to invest in rehabilitation and education programs for prisoners so that they have a chance to turn their life around”

Thank you to my colleagues in the Joint Legislative Council for introducing this bill as well as my fellow members on the Committee on Corrections including Chairman Representative Schraa. I am happy to answer any questions.



October 3, 2023

Chairman Schraa and members of the Assembly Committee on Corrections,

I had the honor to serve on the 2022 Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities. Thank you to Chair Felzkowski, Vice-Chair Schraa, as well as fellow legislative members Senator Taylor and Representatives Stubbs and Petryk. As always, the Committee also benefited from the experiences, perspectives, and service of the non-legislative members.

The Committee took on an ambitious task. The re-entry landscape is complicated and the needs of the individuals returning from our care are diverse and many. We learned about a huge variety of policy solutions, their efficacy, and how Wisconsinites would benefit from them. One of the hardest tasks was to focus on just a few ideas. At times I worried the effort would not result in draft legislation simply because there's so much to do its difficult to know where to start.

The four bills in Committee today, Assembly Bills 180-183, represent just that – a strong start in improving opportunity and employability for individuals returning from our care.

Assembly Bill 180 is the most straight forward. We heard from employers on the Committee how beneficial it would be to create a place to seek information and guidance on hiring returning individuals. Under the bill, the Department of Workforce Development must create a hotline for employers to find information regarding the hiring of individuals with a criminal conviction.

Assembly Bill 181 expands an existing program called the Earned Release Program (ERP). ERP has existed for decades, but is limited by state law to individuals determined to have a substance use disorder. Only individuals with non-violent convictions are eligible and the ERP program requires the sentencing court to determine that the individual has a substance use need. The court may, after completion of the substance use treatment, reduce the in-custody portion of the individual's sentence. The amount of confinement time reduced is then added to the individual's community supervision.

The bill would retain all of current law's procedure and eligibility, but add the completion of an "employment readiness training program" for the court's consideration to reduce the individual's confinement time. An additional provision was added that would require individuals in custody to serve no less than two-thirds of their confinement time prior to being released. Like ERP, any reduction in confinement time would be added to community supervision.



At least 19 states have similar laws expressly allowing a reduction of confinement time for successful completion of education/vocation training. To ensure the new law is implemented and works as intended, the bill also requires public reports, filed with the Legislature, documenting the recidivism rates of participants.

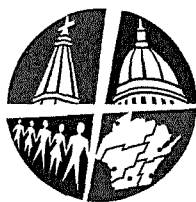
Assembly Bill 182 needs the greatest amount of work of the four being heard today. Presentations to the Study Committee routinely pointed to the need for additional housing options for individuals as they return. Housing is obviously a top priority for returning individuals and unstable housing often leads to reduced success in all of the other areas needed to be successful, stable, sober, etc. While Assembly Bill 182 will need changes, it begins an important conversation about housing for this specific population and their specific needs and challenges.

Assembly Bill 183 would begin to rethink the service delivery model in re-entry. By helping create a single place for individuals to turn to for re-entry services and support, program enrollment and delivery will be more efficient and effective. The bill requires partnerships with nonprofits working with the re-entry population and lists the areas of treatment or services imagined all under one roof.

One major, positive impact not found within the four corners of the bill is the collaboration that will naturally occur by breaking down silos within the re-entry service landscape. First, organizations will hone best practices and working in proximity will lead to better collaboration and a holistic approach to addressing individuals presenting with multiple re-entry needs. Second, by assuming a support role rather than the project lead, the facility will be less government-building and more community space, offering a more therapeutic and recovery focused environment. Last, the new space will likely foster stronger peer to peer mentorship opportunities. Returning individuals often best relate to people that understand the unique experiences of serving time in prison.

Assembly Bill 183 also includes a strong data collection and reporting requirement to ensure the model works and serves as proof of concept should the outcomes warrant expansion beyond the one initial site.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of these bills and support the hard work of the 2022 Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities.



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Representative Michael Schraa, Chair  
Members, Assembly Committee on Corrections

FROM: Tia Izzia, Associate Director for Human Life & Social Concerns

DATE: October 3, 2023

RE: Support for Assembly Bills 180, 181, 182, and 183

---

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to support Assembly Bills 180, 181, 182, and 183, which offer needed opportunities to individuals who are exiting incarceration. We thank all the members of the Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities for helping to bring these bills forward.

Others here before the committee today will speak eloquently to how each of these bills individually will help build employment, housing, and other supports for people who were formerly incarcerated. What the WCC would like to speak to is the paramount importance of reintegrating those involved with the criminal justice system back into our communities.

In 1998, Wisconsin's Catholic bishops convened a 15-member Task Force on Corrections to review the state's criminal justice system. The Task Force included a formerly incarcerated person, several crime victims, a former Supreme Court Justice, the director of a community program that helps place offenders in jobs and housing, an assistant district attorney for Milwaukee County, a prison chaplain, a retired county sheriff, a former probation officer, and priests who ministered to both the incarcerated and to victims. The Task Force heard testimony from Department of Corrections officials, prison inmates, victims of crime, theologians, and advocates for judicial and prison reform.

With the findings of the Task Force, the bishops then published *Public Safety, the Common Good, and the Church: A Statement on Crime and Punishment in Wisconsin*. Their statement called for a statewide evaluation of criminal justice policies to determine how they convey respect for the human person, serve the common good, exercise an option for the poor and marginalized, serve the end of restoration, and foster the principle of solidarity among all in the community. As they stated: "Policies must be assessed in terms of their capacity to assure that offenders will live a productive and peaceful life in the community to which they return."<sup>1</sup> Nearly 25 years after this report was published, and after countless secular efforts to improve our criminal justice system, much remains to be done. All too often, men and women are released from jails and prisons with little, if anything, to their name, and without a healthy community to call home.

Those who are re-entering our communities after incarceration deserve the opportunity to rebuild their lives. Many are eager to work, but face substantial barriers. In the words of Pope Francis: "Many times, once released from prison, the person has to deal with a world that is foreign to him, and which also



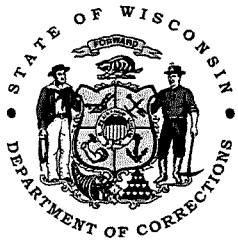
does not recognize him as worthy of trust, even going so far as to exclude him from the possibility of working to obtain a decent livelihood. Preventing people from recovering the full exercise of their dignity, these people remain once again exposed to the dangers that accompany a lack of opportunities for development, amidst violence and insecurity.”<sup>2</sup> We can and must choose a better path.

While more must be done, these four bills will make reentry in Wisconsin more humane and individuals more successful. The bills demonstrate what can be accomplished through careful deliberation, stakeholder involvement, and bipartisan cooperation. We thank you for hearing these bills today and respectfully urge you to pass them.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Public Safety, the Common Good, and the Church: A Statement on Crime and Punishment in Wisconsin* by Wisconsin’s Roman Catholic Bishops. Wisconsin Catholic Conference, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *Pope Francis Speech to the International Meeting for Regional and National Managers of Prison Pastoral Care*. November 8, 2019. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20191108\\_pastorale-carceraria.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191108_pastorale-carceraria.html).



# WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

---

**To: Chairman Schraa, Assembly Committee on Corrections**

**From: Anna Neal, Legislative Advisor, Wisconsin Department of Corrections**

**Date: October 3, 2023**

---

**RE: Information Only**

- *Assembly Bill 180 Relating to: establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record.*
  - *Assembly Bill 181 Relating to: earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority.*
  - *Assembly Bill 182 Relating to: a certification of rental readiness and funding to cover damages caused by certification of rental readiness holders.*
  - *Assembly Bill 183 Relating to: establishing and operating community reentry centers and making an appropriation*
- 

The Department of Corrections (DOC) has been a vocal advocate for increasing resources and programs to assist the Persons in our Care with finding and maintaining meaningful employment. The Legislative Council Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities sought out creative solutions to assist the agency in meeting their goals. DOC believes the committee's thoughtful attention and recognition of the barriers in place for justice involved individuals, have assisted in drafting a series of thoughtful bills for consideration.

As our agency continues to use evidenced-based decision making to implement programs and practices, we appreciate the committees such as these, who work alongside us to find bipartisan solutions. DOC supports the overall goals within these bills, and is grateful to the study committee for seeking out information from our agency to identify the needs of the population, and learn more about our business process.

We look forward to working with members of the legislature on any revisions that may be needed, and with our partner agencies anywhere our work may intersect.