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# Wisconsin Legislative Council

## REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

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### STUDY COMMITTEE ON INCREASING OFFENDER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

[2023 Senate Bill 169 and 2023 Assembly Bill 180  
2023 Senate Bill 170 and 2023 Assembly Bill 181  
2023 Senate Bill 171 and 2023 Assembly Bill 182  
2023 Senate Bill 172 and 2023 Assembly Bill 183]

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The Wisconsin Legislative Council is a nonpartisan legislative service agency. Among other services provided to the Wisconsin Legislature, staff of the Wisconsin Legislative Council conduct study committees under the direction of the Joint Legislative Council.

Established in 1947, the Joint Legislative Council directs study committees to study and recommend legislation regarding major policy questions facing the state. Study committee members are selected by the Joint Legislative Council and include both legislators and citizen members who are knowledgeable about a study committee's topic.

This document summarizes committee activity and presents study committee recommendations to the Joint Legislative Council.

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## PART I | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities, chaired by Senator Mary Felzkowski, was tasked with studying impediments to employment for individuals with criminal convictions, expanding connections between private employers and this pool of potential employees, exploring other methods for improving job prospects for individuals with prior convictions, and recommending legislation to address these issues. The study committee completed its assignment in February 2023, and recommended four bill drafts for introduction in the 2023-24 legislative session.

### **BACKGROUND**

Wisconsin employers seek additional employees, Wisconsin citizens with criminal convictions seek additional training and employment opportunities, and Wisconsin taxpayers seek to reduce costs associated with crime, recidivism, and incarceration. This environment has generated interest in programs that provide job training and placement for individuals who are currently incarcerated, nearing release, or recently released from prison, and programs that reduce obstacles to successful employment.

Stable employment is an important element in transitioning individuals from prison back to the community and preventing recidivism. However, individuals with prior convictions face significant obstacles to securing jobs that enable them to be self-sustaining. These factors include lack of employment training and experience, lack of education, lack of affordable housing, lack of access to treatment services, and even lack of critical documents such as a birth certificate, driver's license, or State Identification (ID) Card.

Potential employers also face obstacles to accessing and employing individuals with criminal convictions. Employers are often unaware of existing state and federal programs that provide incentives for hiring individuals with criminal records, or do not have the time or available staff to navigate requirements applicable to employing individuals who are on Department of Corrections (DOC) supervision or work release. This is particularly true for smaller employers that do not have dedicated human resources personnel.

### **STUDY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study committee met five times between August 2022 and January 2023, and heard testimony and collected policy ideas from employers, nonprofit organizations, workforce development boards, landlords, and national organizations. The committee also obtained background information from DOC, the Wisconsin Technical College System, and the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) on existing job training and educational programming for incarcerated individuals.

Committee members decided to pursue policies that offer resources for employers interested in hiring individuals with prior convictions, create a limited earned release program for offenders who complete employment training programs, pilot a program allowing individuals releasing from prison to access all necessary services in one physical location, and provide incentives for landlords to rent to individuals with prior convictions.

The committee recommended the following four bill drafts for introduction by the Joint Legislation Council:

- **LRB-1505/1**, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority.
- **LRB-1301/1**, relating to a certification of rental readiness and funding to cover damages caused by certification of rental readiness holders.
- **LRB-1540/1**, relating to establishing and operating community reentry centers and making an appropriation.
- **LRB-0516/1**, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record.

All four bill drafts were unanimously approved by committee members voting via mail ballot in February 2023.

## **INTRODUCTION BY THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

At its March 23, 2023 meeting, the Joint Legislative Council voted to approve all of the committee's recommendations and introduce the following four bills in the 2023-24 Legislative Session:

- 2023 Senate Bill 169 and 2023 Assembly Bill 180, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record.
- 2023 Senate Bill 170 and 2023 Assembly Bill 181, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority.
- 2023 Senate Bill 171 and 2023 Assembly Bill 182, relating to a certification of rental readiness and funding to cover damages caused by certification of rental readiness holders.
- 2023 Senate Bill 172 and 2023 Assembly Bill 183, relating to establishing and operating community reentry centers and making an appropriation.

The remainder of this report includes the following parts:

**Part II** provides a summary of the testimony and committee discussion at each meeting, and outlines the four bill drafts recommended for introduction by the Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities.

**Part III** provides background information on, and a detailed description of, the four bills introduced by the Joint Legislative Council.

**Part IV** records the votes taken by the study committee to recommend the bills for introduction and the votes taken by the Joint Legislative Council to introduce the bills.

## PART II | COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

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The Joint Legislative Council established the Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities and appointed the chairperson by a mail ballot dated April 8, 2022. The study committee was directed to review existing impediments to employment and job training for individuals who are incarcerated or recently released and to recommend legislation following its review. The committee was also tasked with exploring ways to expand connections between private employers and potential employees who are incarcerated in state institutions or on extended supervision, exploring vocational earned release programs for possible implementation, considering release location flexibility based on employment opportunities, and evaluating other methods for improving job prospects for the offender population.

To assist in completing this charge, the Joint Legislative Council appointed the study committee's membership by mail ballot dated May 31, 2022. The final committee membership consisted of two senators, four representatives, and five public members. **Appendix 1** lists the committee members.

### SUMMARY OF MEETINGS

The study committee held five meetings on the following dates at the State Capitol in Madison:

- August 30, 2022.
- September 29, 2022.
- October 21, 2022.
- November 10, 2022.
- January 11, 2023.

#### August 30, 2022

At its first meeting on August 30, 2022, the committee heard a presentation by the DOC from Melissa Roberts, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Dr. Silvia Jackson, Reentry Director, Lisa Reible, Deputy Warden, and Quala Champagne, Warden. The presenters provided an overview of DOC programs and services related to employment, which described DOC reentry vocational training and employment initiatives and educational programming, and provided statistics on completion rates, program outcomes, and employment outcomes.

The committee also heard a presentation by the **Wisconsin Technical College System** (WTCS) from Lenard Simpson, Education Director, Justice-Involved Populations, Office of Student Success, and Brandon Trujillo, Policy Advisory, Policy and Government Relations Office. The presenters provided an overview of WTCS employment training and placement programs offered for the justice-involved population.

Additionally, the **DWD** offered a presentation by Jenifer Cole, Legislative Liaison, Michele Carter, Division Administrator, Division of Enterprise Technology, Steve Laesch, Deputy Division Administrator, DET, and Rebecca Kikkert, Director, DET Office of Special Initiatives. The presenters gave an overview of DWD programs and employer incentives aimed at the justice-involved population, including mobile training labs, fidelity bonding, and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program.

Following invited testimony, committee members discussed other speakers they wished to hear from and challenges faced by those with prior convictions. Discussion focused on the difficulty

of finding available and affordable housing, employer liability for hiring those with prior convictions, Certificates of Qualification for Employment (CQE), and instructor shortages for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming.

## **September 29, 2022**

At its second meeting, on September 29, 2022, the committee reviewed an informational memorandum prepared by Legislative Council relating to the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit, vocational earned release, work release under 2017 Wisconsin Act 89, employer liability for hiring individuals with prior convictions, “Ban the Box” prohibitions on job applications, anti-fraternization rules, and expungement.

The committee heard a presentation by the **Workforce Development Board of Southcentral Wisconsin**, from Seth Lentz, CEO, and **Employ Milwaukee Workforce Development** from Chytania Brown, CEO. The presenters described several programs that the regional workforce development boards oversee and administer, including the Windows to Work program in collaboration with DOC, and a federally funded pilot program that creates a jobs program center within jails. The speakers also provided information on technical training done in collaboration with technical colleges and often taking place on college campuses.

The committee also heard a presentation from the **National Conference of State Legislatures** (NCSL) from Michael Hartman, Policy Associate, Criminal & Civil Justice Program, and Amanda Essex, Esq., Program Principal, Criminal Justice Program. The presenters explained trends in state legislatures relating to offender reentry and employment. These include pre- and post-release training and education, sentence credits that allow offenders to earn time off of their incarceration or supervision time, efforts to assist offenders in obtaining ID cards and drivers’ licenses, liability protection for employers who hire offenders, expungement and other methods of sealing criminal history, and efforts to increase housing opportunities upon reentry. Committee members discussed the effectiveness of these laws, particularly sentence credits and “ban the box” legislation relating to hiring.

In addition, the committee heard a presentation from Adam Procell, a Community Engagement Specialist at **Partners in Hope**. Mr. Procell noted that research indicates that having a job is an important factor in post-incarceration success. The presenter urged the committee to promote ways that the prison system can coordinate reentry efforts, ideally beginning as soon as someone is arrested, continuing through any period of incarceration, and extending beyond release. Mr. Procell indicated that legislation is required to centralize and integrate what are now silos of programming and the coordination of efforts saves money, promotes efficiency, and is the most effective means of serving this population.

The committee discussed the role of community supervision and the need to coordinate efforts among public and private entities to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. The committee noted that the low unemployment rate in the state has created new opportunities, both for creating job openings and encouraging higher wages to attract workers.

The final presenter at this hearing was Devon Kurtz, Public Safety Policy Director at the **Cicero Institute**. Mr. Kurtz described the very high correlation between recidivism and unemployment, noting that even sporadic employment reduces a person’s chances of returning to prison significantly. Mr. Kurtz provided an overview of programs that provide incentives to achieve identified goals, and the committee agreed that bipartisan support can be found for measures that reduce recidivism, have a positive community impact, and save money.

Following invited testimony, the committee discussed which speakers they would like to invite in the future, including formerly incarcerated individuals, DOC community supervising agents,



employers who work with recently released individuals, and representatives from community-based organizations that successfully serve formerly incarcerated offenders.

## **October 21, 2022**

The committee heard a presentation from representatives of **DOC**, including Niel Thoreson, Regional Chief for Region 3, Jessica Goodwin, Employment Coordinator for Region 3, Sherry Kelber, Corrections Field Supervisor, and Paulina Gutiérrez, Legislative Advisor. The DOC agents described pre-release programming done by the agency, which typically begins six months prior to release, post-incarceration placement policies, and community services available to individuals once they are released to the community.

The presenters described several programs available in different regions of the state. These included the Community Corrections Employment program, which assists individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment following release from prison, and the Windows to Work program, which involves community partner coaches, cognitive intervention for employment programs, and assistance in resume writing, job research, and financial literacy while a person is incarcerated and upon release.

The committee next heard from Corina Eufinger, Chairperson of the Board of the **Wisconsin Apartment Association**. The presenter addressed challenges and concerns expressed by members of the association in renting to formerly incarcerated individuals, and noted that even one tenant causing physical damage to a rental unit can have significant financial implications for a landlord that a security deposit does little to cover. The speaker also noted that police calls, property damage, and tenant conduct can impact a landlord's ability to successfully rent units.

Committee members discussed incentives to encourage landlords to rent to recently released individuals, including tax incentives, guaranteed rental or security deposit payments, and educating landlords on available resources.

Additionally, the committee heard a presentation by Jerome Dillard, Executive Director of **EXPO (Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing)** Wisconsin. The presenter described barriers to successful reentry, including the loss of employment when an individual is on a revocation hold, the impact of a CCAP entry, and the inability of those with felony convictions to participate in their communities by voting. Mr. Dillard suggested specific actions for the study committee, including investing in community-wide mentorship programs run by formerly incarcerated individuals; allowing formerly incarcerated individuals inside institutions to work with people prior to release; requiring DOC to incorporate technology training within institutions; and educating the community about the benefits of hiring formerly incarcerated individuals.

The final presenter at this hearing was Kristine Hillmer, President and CEO, **Wisconsin Restaurant Association**. Ms. Hillmer discussed the restaurant employee shortage and the second chance opportunity that restaurant employment provides to those with prior convictions. She noted challenges to such employment, including community and staff perceptions, concern about individuals handling credit card information and cash, ability of justice-involved employees to access public transportation, DOC agent reporting requirements, and lack of funds to provide culinary arts training to more individuals post-release.

The speaker recommended the committee consider a program that helps offenders earn restaurant industry credentials, connect them with employers, and provide continued support and services as offenders become self-sufficient after release.

After invited testimony, the committee discussed topics raised at prior meetings from which the committee could develop draft legislation. The topics, addressed in length in [Legislative Council](#)

[Memorandum Memo No. 2](#), included a centralized reentry services pilot, expanding the earned release program to cover vocational training and employment, and a central hotline for employers to obtain information about employing formerly incarcerated individuals. The committee agreed to pursue legislation relating to these topics, and to consider options for certain protections for landlords who rent to offenders.

Additionally, the members briefly addressed expanding the use of CQEs, helping individuals obtain critical documents, “Ban the Box” legislation, creation of a state Work Opportunity Tax Credit, peer mentoring programs, providing earlier reentry programming, and clearing of criminal history records. The committee decided to not to take action on these topics, or to incorporate certain elements of them into other proposals.

## **November 10, 2022**

At its November meeting, the committee heard presentations from **The Way Out**, the **DOC**, and the **Apartment Association of Southeastern Wisconsin**, and discussed bill drafts prepared at the committee’s request.

Eli Rivera, Founder and CEO of **The Way Out**, described his organization’s efforts to connect employers with justice-involved job seekers by administering a virtual platform that provides access to resources and services, and provides some incentives to job seekers who participate in the program. The platform also serves agencies or organizations that can provide reentry services to justice-involved individuals by “matching” them to its clients, and tracking performance for each client. Mr. Rivera explained that the organization is not seeking state funding, but would like to work with DOC to enhance services.

Alisha Kraus, Director, Office of Program Services for the Division of Adult Institutions, and Paulina Gutiérrez, Legislative Advisor at **DOC**, appeared before the committee to provide additional information relating to DOC’s release planning process. The committee heard that release planning occurs throughout an individual’s time in confinement, but that DOC typically creates a specific plan for release when an inmate is within six to nine months of release.

As part of the plan and programming, individuals are assisted in obtaining a birth certificate, Social Security card, state ID card, or driver’s license. Additionally, individuals are assessed for treatment needs, and assisted with obtaining housing, Medicaid, and community resources. The committee discussed the need for documentation to secure employment and requested additional information on the type of documents needed to obtain a state ID or driver’s license.

William Lauer appeared for the **Apartment Association of Southeastern Wisconsin**. Mr. Lauer stated that in his experience, justice-involved persons are not more prone to damaging property than any other tenants, but landlords may hesitate to rent to these individuals for fear of running afoul of nuisance property ordinances and fear of being sued if a justice-involved renter causes harm to another person.

Mr. Lauer suggested that legislative fixes to encourage owners to rent to justice-involved individuals include restricting or preempting nuisance laws, removing liability for actions of the tenants, and supporting landlords who protect other tenants by removing trouble tenants. The committee discussed its options for legislation that would limit risk for landlords who rent to justice-involved individuals. Members decided to review bill drafts to create a state bonding program covering physical damages done by certain justice-involved individuals, and a bill draft to provide immunity from liability for landlords who rent to certain individuals with prior convictions.

The committee then discussed bill drafts it requested at the prior meeting. The committee considered LRB-0516/P3, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record. Members requested that DWD be directed to create a website, in addition to a hotline.

The committee also considered LRB-6555/P2, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of a vocational readiness training. The committee requested changes to update terminology, allow currently incarcerated individuals to petition for eligibility, and to cap the amount of time that can be converted from confinement time to extended supervision.

Finally, the committee discussed LRB-6560/P3, relating to creating a program to establish and operate community reentry centers. Members discussed expanding the groups with which DOC may contract, participation in the centers by DOC agents, and prioritizing areas of the state with the largest numbers of individuals releasing from prison.

## **January 11, 2023**

The committee held its final meeting on January 11, 2023, and discussed the latest versions of the bill drafts drafted at its request. The committee decided to move forward with LRB-0516/P5, establishing an employer hotline, without making changes. The committee then agreed to incorporate DOC-requested changes to LRB-6555/P4, employment readiness training earned release.

Next, the committee requested changes to LRB-6560/P5, community reentry centers, relating to priority in awarding DOC contracts, expanding eligibility for contracts to for-profit organizations and governmental entities, and changing the data collection and reporting requirements under the bill draft.

The committee then considered the final two bill drafts relating to rental-readiness and protections for landlords who rent to individuals with prior convictions, and decided to combine them into a single bill draft. Members also decided to award a certification of rental readiness to those completing a DOC unit during pre-release programming, to provide landlords who rent to offenders who have completed this unit immunity from certain liability, and to ask WHEDA to create a bonding program to cover certain damages by those offenders.

The committee determined that members would vote on revised versions of the bill drafts via a mail ballot, and that the committee would not hold any additional meetings.



## PART III | INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

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The following Part provides background information on, and a description of, the bills recommended by the Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities and introduced by the Joint Legislative Council.

### **2023 SENATE BILL 169 AND 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 180, RELATING TO ESTABLISHING A HOTLINE FOR EMPLOYERS INTERESTED IN HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH A CONVICTION RECORD**

#### **Background**

DWD and DOC work collaboratively to assist offenders in accessing job training, education, job placement services, and transportation to work sites, and to provide some assistance to employers in receiving referrals and reaching applicants. The committee determined that employers and offenders would benefit from having easy and comprehensive access to information relating to employment programs, training, and opportunities to hire offenders. The committee determined that DWD is well-suited to provide this information to employers and that a variety of means, including a hotline and an informational page on its website, would be helpful to employers who wish to employ offenders.

#### **Description**

The bill requires DWD to establish a hotline, operating during normal business hours and staffed by DWD employees, to assist employers seeking to employ individuals with a conviction record. The bill requires DWD to provide information and assistance relating to available incentives and programs under state and federal law for employing individuals with a criminal record, including individuals participating in certain work release programs.

### **2023 SENATE BILL 170 AND 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 181, RELATING TO EARNED RELEASE FOR INMATES UPON COMPLETION OF AN EMPLOYMENT READINESS TRAINING PROGRAM AND GRANTING RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY**

#### **Background**

Current law provides a limited earned release program that allows eligible inmates to be released to extended supervision or parole early if they complete a substance abuse program. The existing program is only available for inmates who meet the following conditions: (1) the individual is serving time for a nonviolent crime; (2) the individual was deemed eligible by the sentencing court; and (3) the individual successfully completes a DOC substance abuse treatment program. An eligible inmate who completes the treatment program will have his or her sentence modified by a court to convert remaining confinement time in prison to supervised time in the community. The program allows for early release under DOC supervision while maintaining the total length of an individual's sentence.

The existing earned release program is only available to inmates with substance abuse needs who complete substance abuse programs, and not to those who earn educational credentials or

complete job training programs. Presently, an individual must be deemed eligible or ineligible for the earned release program at the time the individual is initially sentenced.

## **Description**

The bill expands the existing earned release program to also apply to eligible inmates who complete an Employment Readiness Training Program (ERTP). An “employment readiness training program” is defined to mean an education, job training, employment, or other equivalent evidence-based program intended to lead to employment and reduce recidivism. DOC is authorized to promulgate administrative rules for implementation of the program, including any requirements for what programming qualifies as an ERTP for earned release purposes.

The bill restricts the amount of time that a judge may convert from confinement time in prison to supervision time in the community for individuals qualifying for and completing an ERTP. An inmate cannot be released to supervision until he or she has served at least two-thirds of the confinement in prison portion of his or her bifurcated sentence. Thus, for an individual who successfully completes an ERTP, the judge may convert no more than 33 percent of the individual’s prison time to DOC extended supervision time.

Under the bill, an eligible inmate who has DOC approval may petition the sentencing court for ERTP eligibility at any point after sentencing. The bill also requires DOC to prepare biennial reports providing data on inmates eligible for ERTP, program enrollments and completions, recidivism rates for those granted early release to supervision, and cost savings from reduced confinement time.

## **2023 SENATE BILL 171 AND 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 182, RELATING TO A CERTIFICATION OF RENTAL READINESS AND FUNDING TO COVER DAMAGES CAUSED BY CERTIFICATION OF RENTAL READINESS HOLDERS**

### **Background**

DOC offers reentry programming to assist individuals who are leaving confinement in a DOC facility and entering into a period of supervision in the community. Typically, this reentry assistance programming includes training and education, an assessment of needs, and a plan for successful reentry into the community. The committee heard that one of the most pressing needs for individuals returning to the community from prison is securing housing, particularly in a location that enables the person to comply with the terms of his or her release, obtain and keep employment, and have access to other needed services.

The committee received testimony that some landlords are reluctant to rent to individuals with criminal convictions due to a perception that the landlord may be liable for harm to other residents or damage to property caused by these renters. The committee considered several options that might provide an incentive to landlords who choose to rent to offenders and focused on two particular barriers: (1) landlord concerns that they may be held liable for harms to other people caused by the offenders in their rental properties; and (2) concerns that offenders may not be able to pay for physical damage they may cause to rental properties.

The committee determined that offenders should receive specialized training focused on being a responsible renter, and that DOC should be the entity responsible for providing the training. The committee determined, however, that the department should have guidance and input from other stakeholders, including community organizations and landlord groups.

Current law provides some immunity from civil liability to employers who hire individuals who possess a Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE), which is a credential nonviolent offenders may be awarded by the Council on Offender Employment. The committee decided to extend similar civil immunity to landlords who rent to offenders who can demonstrate that they have received the specialized DOC training focused on being a responsible renter.

The committee also determined that there should be a state agency program available to offer assurance to landlords who wish to rent to an offender who has received the specialized DOC responsible renter training. The program would pay, for a limited time after the person's release from confinement, for any physical damage caused to a rental property by the person.

## **Description**

The bill allows an offender to obtain a certificate of rental readiness by successfully completing, as part of his or her prelease programming from DOC, training on rental readiness. Under the bill, DOC may consult with WHEDA, city or county landlord-tenant training agencies, or other interested organizations or agencies to develop criteria for successful completion of the training on rental readiness.

The bill additionally authorizes WHEDA to administer a bond program to fund repairs for physical damage to rental property caused by an individual who has been issued a certification of rental readiness before he or she enters into a rental agreement for the damaged property. Under the bill, funds from the program may cover repairs for a single 12-month lease period, within the first two years after the individual's release from confinement.

Finally, the bill grants immunity from civil liability to a landlord who leases a residence to an individual who has been issued a certification of rental readiness for certain injuries caused by the certified individual's intentional acts or omissions.

## **2023 SENATE BILL 172 AND 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 183, RELATING TO ESTABLISHING AND OPERATING COMMUNITY REENTRY CENTERS AND MAKING AN APPROPRIATION**

### **Background**

The committee heard testimony regarding the difficulty individuals who are newly released from prison have in accessing all the services and resources needed for a successful transition back into the community from prison. These individuals face unique challenges in obtaining critical documentation like driver's licenses and birth certificates, opening bank accounts, accessing mental health and treatment services, obtaining job placement services, renting apartments, and registering for vocational training. In addition, many recently released individuals lack transportation to the various locations where services are provided.

To address these difficulties, the committee determined that DOC should contract with an entity that can create a single physical location for newly released individuals to access services. The committee envisioned at least one initial contract for a "one-stop shop" in a county with large numbers of individuals returning from prison to the community. The committee also expressed an intent for the location or locations to serve as a pilot program for potential expansion to other areas of the state, if they show successful outcomes for individuals served based on required DOC reporting.

## **Description**

The bill requires DOC to contract with at least one nonprofit organization, for-profit entity, or public agency to establish a community reentry center. A community reentry center is a community site offering individuals who are being released from prison initial points of contact for each of the following: health services, identification document services, financial services, housing services, employment services, education services, and DOC supervision services. The bill creates an appropriation for community reentry centers, but does not appropriate any funds. If the Legislature does not appropriate money for the program, DOC must pay for the contract or contracts from existing agency funds.

The nonprofit organization or other entity operating a community reentry center must oversee, coordinate, and develop memoranda of understanding with other organizations for services provided at the center. The entity must operate the center in a location easily accessible by public transportation and by the population it serves, and must provide initial points of contact for all the services listed above. When awarding reentry center contracts, DOC must prioritize entities that: (1) collaborate with organizations providing services at the center, justice-involved individuals, criminal justice coordinating councils, technical colleges, and workforce investment boards; and (2) propose to operate a center in one of the counties that receives the largest numbers of individuals releasing from prison.

The bill requires DOC to create a comprehensive report examining outcomes of services provided at each reentry center. DOC must submit the first report by 2027, and submit a report every two years thereafter. Any entity operating a reentry center under contract with DOC must track and compile data for services provided at the center, including the number and type of services offered and the reported outcomes.



## PART IV | VOTES

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### COMMITTEE VOTES

By a February 13, 2023 mail ballot, the Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities voted unanimously to recommend the following bill drafts for introduction by the Joint Legislative Council in the 2023-24 legislative session:

- **LRB-1505/P2**, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 10 (Sens. Felzkowski and Taylor; Reps. Schraa, Goyke, Petryk, and Stubbs; and Public Members Allman, Isahaku, Rivera, and Roddy); Noes, 0; and Not Voting, 1 (Public Member Wahlin).
- **LRB-1301/P4**, relating to a certification of rental readiness and funding to cover damages caused by certification of rental readiness holders, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 10 (Sens. Felzkowski and Taylor; Reps. Schraa, Goyke, Petryk, and Stubbs; and Public Members Allman, Isahaku, Rivera, and Roddy), Noes, 0; and Not Voting, 1 (Public Member Wahlin).
- **LRB-1540/P2**, relating to establishing and operating community reentry centers and making an appropriation, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 10 (Sens. Felzkowski and Taylor; Reps. Schraa, Goyke, Petryk, and Stubbs; and Public Members Allman, Isahaku, Rivera, and Roddy); Noes, 0; and Not Voting, 1 (Public Member Wahlin).
- **LRB-0516/P6**, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 10 (Sens. Felzkowski and Taylor; Reps. Schraa, Goyke, Petryk, and Stubbs; and Public Members Allman, Isahaku, Rivera, and Roddy); Noes, 0; and Not Voting, 1 (Public Member Wahlin).

### JOINT LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL VOTES

At the March 23, 2023 meeting, the Joint Legislative Council received the recommendations of the study committee. The Joint Legislative Council voted to approve all of the study committee's recommendations and introduce the following bills:

- **LRB-1505/1**, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 21 (Sens. Kapenga, Agard, Felzkowski, Jagler, LeMahieu, Marklein, Quinn, Smith, Spreitzer, and Testin; and Reps. VanderMeer, August, Billings, Born, Duchow, Goyke, Haywood, Neubauer, Petersen, Plumer, and Vos); Noes, 0; and Excused, 1 (Sen. Johnson). **[LRB-1505/1 was introduced as 2023 Senate Bill 170 and 2023 Assembly Bill 181.]**
- **LRB-1301/1**, relating to a certification of rental readiness and funding to cover damages caused by certification of rental readiness holders, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 21 (Sens. Kapenga, Agard, Felzkowski, Jagler, LeMahieu, Marklein, Quinn, Smith, Spreitzer, and Testin; and Reps. VanderMeer, August, Billings, Born, Duchow, Goyke, Haywood, Neubauer, Petersen, Plumer, and Vos); Noes, 0; and Excused, 1 (Sen. Johnson). **[LRB-1301/1 was introduced as 2023 Senate Bill 171 and 2023 Assembly Bill 182.]**
- **LRB-1540/1**, relating to establishing and operating community reentry centers and making an appropriation, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 21 (Sens. Kapenga, Agard, Felzkowski, Jagler, LeMahieu, Marklein, Quinn, Smith, Spreitzer, and Testin; and Reps. VanderMeer,

August, Billings, Born, Duchow, Goyke, Haywood, Neubauer, Petersen, Plumer, and Vos); Noes, 0; and Excused, 1 (Sen. Johnson). **[LRB-1540/1 was introduced as 2023 Senate Bill 172 and 2023 Assembly Bill 183.]**

- **LRB-0516/1**, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record, was approved by a vote of Ayes, 21 (Sens. Kapenga, Agard, Felzkowski, Jagler, LeMahieu, Marklein, Quinn, Smith, Spreitzer, and Testin; and Reps. VanderMeer, August, Billings, Born, Duchow, Goyke, Haywood, Neubauer, Petersen, Plumer, and Vos); Noes, 0; and Excused, 1 (Sen. Johnson). **[LRB-0516/1 was introduced as 2023 Senate Bill 169 and 2023 Assembly Bill 180.]**

# APPENDIX 1 | LIST OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

## Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities

<b>Chair Mary Felzkowski</b> , Senator Tomahawk, WI 54487	<b>Vice Chair Michael Schraa</b> , Representative Oshkosh, WI 54904
<b>Jan Allman</b> , Senior VP for Public Affairs and Community Relations Fincantieri Marine Group Marinette, WI 54143	<b>Evan Goyke</b> , Representative Milwaukee, WI 53208
<b>Sadique Isahaku</b> , Dean, General Education Milwaukee Area Technical College Milwaukee, WI 53233	<b>Warren Petryk</b> , Representative Eau Claire, WI 54701
<b>Eli Rivera</b> , Founder & CEO The Way Out Milwaukee, WI	<b>Elizabeth Roddy</b> , Recruitment & Training Director ABC of Wisconsin Fort Atkinson, WI 53538
<b>Shelia Stubbs</b> , Representative Madison, WI 53713	<b>Lena Taylor</b> , Senator Milwaukee, WI 53206
<b>Reijo Wahlin</b> , Recruitment Manager Stoughton Trailers Stoughton, WI 53589	

**STUDY ASSIGNMENT:** The study committee is directed to review existing impediments to employment and job training for individuals who are incarcerated or recently released and to recommend legislation following its review. The committee shall explore ways to expand connections between private employers and potential employees who are incarcerated in state institutions or on extended supervision, explore vocational earned release programs for possible implementation, consider release location flexibility based on employment opportunities, and evaluate other methods for improving job prospects for the offender population.

**MEMBERS:** 2 Senators; 4 Representatives; and 5 Public Members.

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STAFF:** Peggy Hurley and Katie Bender-Olson, Senior Staff Attorneys, and Kelly Mautz, Administrative Staff.



## APPENDIX 2 | LIST OF COMMITTEE MATERIALS

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### **August 30, 2022**

- Staff Brief 2022-06, Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities (August 22, 2022).
- Handout, Justice-Involved Educational Programs, from Lenard Simpson, Education Director, Justice-Involved Populations, Office of Student Success, and Brandon Trujillo, Policy Advisor, Policy and Government Relations Office, Wisconsin Technical College System.
- Presentation, Overview of DOC Programs & Services Related to Employment, by Melissa Roberts, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Dr. Silvia Jackson, Reentry Director, Lisa Reible, Deputy Warden, Wisconsin Women's Correctional System (WWCS), and Quala Champagne, Warden, Wisconsin Correctional Center System (WCCS) (August 30, 2022).
- Presentation, Legislative Council Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities Briefing, by Department of Workforce Development (August 30, 2022).
- Presentation, WTCS Employment Training and Placement Programs, by Lenard Simpson, Education Director, Justice-Involved Populations, Office of Student Success, and Brandon Trujillo, Policy Advisor, Policy and Government Relations Office, Wisconsin Technical College System.
- Minutes of the August 30, 2022 meeting.

### **September 29, 2022**

- Memo No. 1, Background Information on Topics Raised at First Study Committee Meeting (September 22, 2022).
- Presentation, Getting Offenders Back to Work: Innovative Policies with Clear Results, by Devon Kurtz, Public Safety Policy Director, The Cicero Institute.
- Presentation, Wisconsin Legislature's Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities, by Seth Lentz, CEO, Workforce Development Board of Southcentral Wisconsin, and Chytania Brown, CEO, Employ Milwaukee Workforce Development (September 29, 2022).
- Presentation, Reentry, Reintegration, & Employment, by Michael Hartman, Policy Associate, Criminal & Civil Justice (September 2022).
- Presentation by Adam Procell, Community Engagement Specialist, Partners in Hope.
- Minutes of the September 29, 2022 meeting.

### **October 21, 2022**

- Memo No. 2, Topics for Committee Discussion (October 14, 2022).
- Presentation, Barriers Facing System-Impacted People Seeking Employment in Wisconsin, by Jerome Dillard, Executive Director, Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing.
- Testimony from the Wisconsin Apartment Association (October 21, 2022).
- Memorandum, Restaurant Industry Employment and HOPES, from Kristine Hillmer, President and CEO, Wisconsin Restaurant Association (October 21, 2022).

- Minutes of the October 21, 2022 meeting.

### **November 10, 2022**

- LRB-0516/P3, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record.
- LRB-6555/P2, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of a vocational readiness training program and granting rule-making authority.
- LRB-6560/P3, relating to creating a program to establish and operate community reentry centers and making an appropriation.
- Memo No. 3, Background Information Requested at October Study Committee Meeting (November 3, 2022.)
- Report, Providing Identification for Those Released From Incarceration, by Michael Hartman, National Conference of State Legislatures (April 2022).
- DWD Comments on LRB-0516/P3, Relating to Establishing a Hotline for Employers Interested in Hiring Individuals with a Conviction Record (November 10, 2022).
- Presentation by Department of Corrections.
- Testimony from Bill Lauer, Apartment Association of Southeastern Wisconsin (November 3, 2022).
- Presentation, Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration Through Technology & Living Wage Jobs!, by Eli Rivera, Founder and CEO, The Way Out.
- Document, Release Plan Information Form, submitted by the Department of Corrections.
- Minutes of the November 10, 2022 meeting.

### **January 11, 2023**

- LRB-0516/P5, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record.
- LRB-1301/P1, relating to a certification of rental readiness, funding to cover damages caused by certificate of rental readiness holders, and granting rule-making authority.
- LRB-6555/P4, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority.
- LRB-6560/P5, relating to creating a program to establish and operate community reentry centers and making an appropriation.
- LRB-6561/P2, relating to a certification of rental readiness and granting rule-making authority.
- Memo No. 4, Information Requested at the November 10, 2022 Study Committee Meeting (January 4, 2023).
- Minutes of the January 11, 2023 meeting.

### **February 13, 2023 Mail Ballot**

- Results of the February 13, 2023, Mail Ballot
- LRB-0516/P6, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record.

- LRB-1301/P4, relating to certification of rental readiness and funding to cover damages caused by certification of rental readiness holders.
- LRB-1505/P2, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority.
- LRB-1540/P2, relating to establishing and operating community reentry centers and making an appropriation.

### **Recommendations to the Joint Legislative Council**

- CR 2023-05, Study Committee on Improving Offender Employment Opportunities (March 1, 2023).
- LRB-0516/1, relating to establishing a hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record.
- LRB-1301/1, relating to certification of rental readiness and funding to cover damages caused by certification of rental readiness holders.
- LRB-1505/1, relating to earned release for inmates upon the completion of an employment readiness training program and granting rule-making authority.
- LRB-1540/1, relating to establishing and operating community reentry centers and making an appropriation.

### **Joint Legislative Council Recommendations to the 2023-24 Legislature**

- RL 2023-05, Study Committee on Improving Offender Employment Opportunities (May 3, 2023)
- 2023 Senate Bill 169 and 2023 Assembly Bill 180.
- 2023 Senate Bill 170 and 2023 Assembly Bill 181.
- 2023 Senate Bill 171 and 2023 Assembly Bill 182.
- 2023 Senate Bill 172 and 2023 Assembly Bill 183.

[Copies of documents are available at [www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lc](http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lc).]