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*Linking faith communities across Wisconsin to work for Justice*

# WISDOM

**Phone:** 414-831-2070 **Email:** wisdomforjustice@gmail.com  
**Address:** 2821 Vel Phillips Ave, # 217, Milwaukee, WI 53212

## Budget Priority: Expand TAD Funding by \$15 million per Year With ZERO Cost to Taxpayers

The Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD) program is one of the most efficient, cost-effective items in the Wisconsin state budget. Study after study, over more than 10 years, shows that TAD-funded programs save taxpayers more than \$2 for every \$1 that the state has invested.

TAD funds allow counties to establish or expand proven programs, such as Drug Treatment Courts, Veteran's Courts, Family Courts, OWI Courts, the Safe Streets Treatment Options Program (SSTOP), and other interventions that divert people from jail or prison and into alternative programming. Besides saving money, TAD-funded programs have all proven to be more effective than incarceration for reducing recidivism. TAD-funded programs enhance public safety *and* save taxpayer dollars.

A \$15 million increase in TAD funding could result in at least 1,000 fewer people being sent to state prisons each year. It would also divert several thousand people from county jails

WISDOM suggests that the Governor include the \$15 million annual increase for TAD in the Justice Reinvestment Fund that can be created when a major state prison is closed without the construction of a new facility.

Besides \$15 million annual increase in TAD funding, WISDOM urges the following:

- Change the TAD statute so that people who were once convicted of a violent crime can be eligible if the new crime is non-violent in nature. Many counties have said this change would be very helpful and would help TAD programs fulfill their mission. At the same time, change the statute so that people with a mental health issue (and not a co-occurring addiction issue) can be eligible.
- Ensure that the expanded funding is targeted to the communities that have the highest rates of incarceration. The funding should be proportional to the racial, geographic and economic representation in the current population of Wisconsin's jails and prisons.

Wisconsin has a proven program that saves taxpayer money, that reduces crime, and that helps individuals with substance abuse and/or mental health issues regain their health and their standing as productive community members. This program needs to be fully funded.



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## Budget Priority: Close a Major Wisconsin Prison and Use the Savings for a Justice Reinvestment Fund

To interrupt the cycle of mass incarceration in Wisconsin, we need to close a major prison institution. There are three good candidates for closure: The Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI), the Waupun Correctional Institution, and the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF). GBCI and Waupun, both built in the 1800's, are obsolete and increasingly expensive to maintain. MSDF is a fatally flawed building that is not fit for long-term human habitation.

The 2021-23 budget period is an optimal time to close a prison in Wisconsin, for many reasons.

- The current census in Wisconsin's prisons is about 2,500 people fewer than last year. None of the above-mentioned institutions is built to house more than 1,000 people, so it is clearly possible to close one when the pandemic ends.
- The Department of Corrections has plans to significantly alter the "Community Corrections" process, leading to a decrease in the number of people sent back to prison for "crimeless revocations." People serving time for crimeless revocations makes up about 20% of the state prison population.
- The Department of Corrections has plans to greatly increase the capacity for the Earned Release program, which could result in shortening the time in prison for thousands of people each year.
- A \$15 million increase in the Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD) program could divert at least 1,000 people away from Wisconsin prisons each year.
- There is a serious shortage of Corrections Officers in Wisconsin prisons. Closure of a facility could greatly ease that dangerous situation.
- Governor Evers promised in his campaign to reduce the state's prison population by 50%. Closure of a major facility would demonstrate that he intends to honor that commitment.

If, in the next biennium, Wisconsin closes one of the three prison facilities mentioned above, without building a new facility, it can easily afford to re-direct \$50 million per year into a **Justice Reinvestment Fund**. Each of the facilities currently costs at least \$40 million per year to operate. If we were to build a replacement facility, the building cost would be between \$300-500 million – and, of course, the new facility would have operating expenses.

Wisconsin needs to close a major prison facility. As it does so, the state needs to establish a Justice Reinvestment Fund of at least \$50 million per year. A Justice Reinvestment Fund can fund programs like TAD, Transitional Jobs, Housing, Lead Abatement, and Transportation, programs that will build communities and further reduce the number of people incarcerated in our state.



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## Budget Priorities: Restoring Our Communities (ROC) Overview

**WISDOM calls on the Governor to propose a budget that closes a major correctional facility, and does not build a new prison or expand existing prisons.** Three good candidates for closure would be the prisons in Waupun and Green Bay, and the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility.

To reduce the prison population even further than its current level, the state can:

**Increase TAD (Treatment Alternatives and Diversion) funds by \$15 million per year.** This increase would divert at least 2,000 people from the prison system, and many thousands more from county jails. TAD programs, such as Veterans', OWI and Mental Health Courts, are cost-effective, and they reduce recidivism.

**The budget should support the maximum possible expansion of the Department of Corrections' Earned Release Program,** which both reduces the number of people in prison and better prepares people for a successful re-entry after prison.

If the Department of Corrections follows through on plans to **dramatically reduce the number of crimeless revocations**, thousands fewer people will come into our prison system.

**The budget should include a Justice Reinvestment Fund of at least \$50 million per year.** This amount of money would be saved each year by closing a major correctional facility and NOT building a new prison.

A Justice Reinvestment Fund would be used to pay for programs that uplift people and communities, especially those communities that have been most damaged by mass incarceration. The Fund could increase funding for:

**TAD (see above)**

**Transitional Jobs** (to provide an opportunity to transition to stable employment for people re-entering the workforce, especially people returning from incarceration)

**Transit to connect low-income areas with jobs**

**Replacement of lead lateral water pipes** (lead poisoning of children is directly related to later criminal behavior.)

**Housing support, especially for women returning from incarceration.**



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## Budget Priority: Establish a Justice Reinvestment Fund Of at least \$50 Million Per Year, Utilizing the Savings from Closing One Major Prison

As Wisconsin begins to reduce the size of its prison system, it needs to reinvest the savings in those same communities that have been hurt. The process needs to begin in the 2021-23 budget with a **Justice Reinvestment Fund**. The overuse of the “criminal justice” system and mass incarceration of the past 30 years has cost Wisconsin billions of dollars. It has also done tremendous damage to communities and families, especially people of color and people living in poverty. The Justice Reinvestment Fund can begin to repair some of that damage.

By keeping the prison population low enough to close one major institution (the Green Bay and Waupun prisons, along with the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility are all good candidates) and by NOT building a replacement facility, Wisconsin will save at least \$50 million per year. WISDOM calls on the Governor to make that commitment to closure and to reinvestment.

A few potential uses for money in the Justice Reinvestment Fund include:

- An additional \$15 million per year for *Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD)*. This has the additional benefit of further reducing the prison population.
- Expansion of the *Transitional Jobs* program. As the economy recovers, this gives long-term unemployed people a chance to get established in the workforce.
- *Housing Programs*. Housing options are especially needed for women returning from incarceration, to help them achieve stability and to reunite their families
- *Lead Abatement programs*. Lead poisoning of children does permanent damage, and is often associated with later problems with the justice system.
- *Transportation*. There is a particular need to provide public transportation from disadvantaged neighborhoods to places where jobs are available.

The Justice Reinvestment Fund is a win/win for Wisconsinites and is consistent with Governor Evers' stated objective of reducing the prison population by 50%. By capturing the savings gained by closing an institution, the state can further reduce the prison population. Supports for mental, behavioral and physical health can help people to avoid the circumstances that could end in incarceration. Jobs, housing and transportation can ensure that people can be successful.

Wisconsin needs to close a prison facility in the coming year. Through the Justice Reinvestment Fund and further reforms, the state's goal should be to close a second institution by the time of the next budget.