

years, in part due to the huge cost of mass incarceration. In some states, including Iowa, legislators now receive not only fiscal impact statements about those costs, but also "community impact statements" to help them figure out what the consequences of criminalizing behaviors or toughening minimum sentences might be.

"We have professionals and available data that can predict the impact that laws and guidelines will have on various communities, including communities of color, people with disabilities and low-income people," the blueprint says. Community Impact Statements would not favor any particular action — they would simply aid legislators and the general public in understanding how different actions would affect different communities."

State Rep. Sandy Pasch (D-Shorewood), who will be leaving the Legislature at the end of the year, proposed such a bill months ago, but it went nowhere.

Solitary opposed

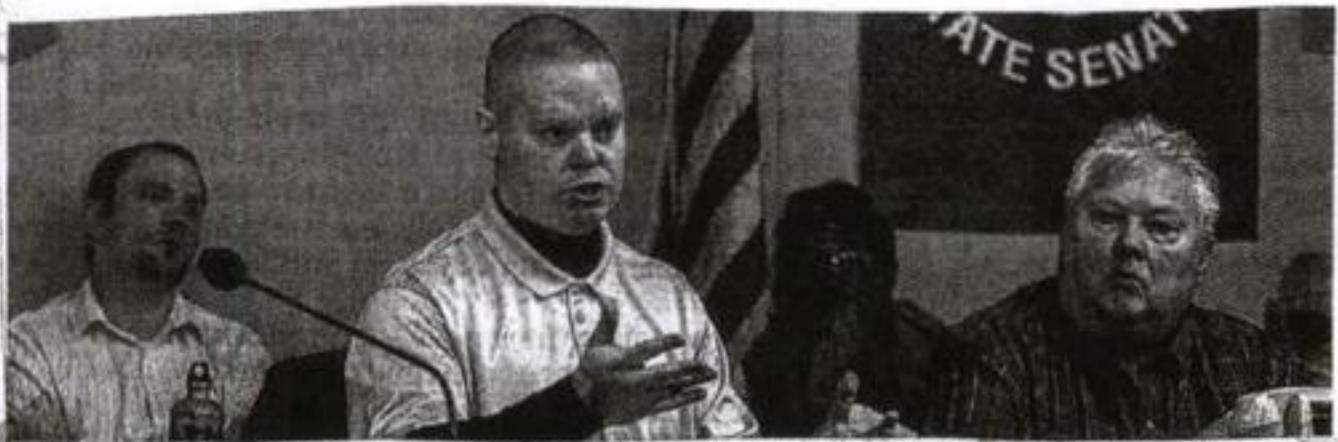
People sent to prison — before or after truth in sentencing — should not be housed in solitary confinement, and those sentenced before that law took effect deserve a fair chance for parole, WISDOM contends.

As of 2012, the most recent figure available, the average number of Wisconsin male prisoners in solitary confinement at any given time was 1,469, according to a survey by the Association of State Correctional Administrators.

According to United Nations international standards, holding someone in solitary for more than 15 days constitutes torture. The 2012 survey shows Wisconsin held more than 600 prisoners in solitary for six to 12 months, and 14 had been held in those conditions for more than 10 years.

"Solitary confinement is ineffective, immoral, dangerous and very expensive," the blueprint says.

In Colorado, the number of prisoners in solitary has dropped from 1,500 in 2011 to fewer than 500 this year, largely due to the efforts of Rick Raemisch, executive director of the prison system there. His efforts continued those of his predecessor,



Mark Rice talks about how mental health treatments could be improved in Wisconsin prisons during a WISDOM forum in the state Capitol in Madison.



The Rev. Jerry Hancock, president of WISDOM's Madison affiliate, talks about how the blueprint shows that reform is possible.

who was murdered by an inmate released directly from solitary back to the community.

"Depending on your viewpoint, one might think because of what happened, we would do what we can to be sure someone is punished severely," he told the Journal Sentinel earlier this year. "Instead, we want to make sure people are safer, not that prisoners will be worse than when they came in."

Raemisch supervised Wisconsin's corrections department from 2007 to 2011.

In addition to being kept out of solitary (called "segregation" by Wisconsin Department of Corrections officials), the state's prisoners who were sentenced under the old parole system need to be given a fair shot at release, according to WISDOM.

About 2,700 people incarcerated in Wisconsin were sentenced before truth in sentencing took effect and therefore could be eligible for parole, yet remain in custody.

"A broken, out-of-control prison system has denied them a fair chance to be freed and get on with their lives," the blueprint says.

Forty-five percent of parole-eligible inmates are black, compared with 6.5% of the state's population and 43% of all male inmates. More than half committed their crimes in their teens or

20s. The cost of keeping them locked up is about \$100 million a year, paid by state taxpayers.

Parole grants have decreased dramatically in recent years — from 1,146 in 2005 to 152 in 2013.

Post-prison prospects

Those few who are paroled, and those released after serving a set prison term under truth in sentencing, have a hard time finding jobs and succeeding on the outside.

One reason, according to WISDOM, is that Wisconsin employers are allowed to ask about felony convictions on job applications.

"A 'yes' answer usually means instant disqualification," the blueprint says. "The applicant is denied even if they are highly qualified and motivated, even if their crime was years ago or has nothing to do with the job, even if they have turned their life around."

As a result, former prisoners have no way to support themselves and often end up on welfare or back in prison.

States such as Minnesota and Hawaii have "banned the box," meaning employers cannot ask applicants about their criminal histories until the end of the selection process.

"When criminal background checks are done lat-

er, qualified applicants can respond and explain," the blueprint says. "After that conversation, the employer can decide whether or not to deny them the job."

The Rev. Jerry Hancock, president of WISDOM's Madison affiliate, said he hopes the blueprint shows Walker and the incoming state Legislature that change is possible. Hancock, a lawyer and minister who formerly served as an assistant state attorney general, said the state's high prison population affects everyone.

"What it does is destroys hope inside the walls and destroys families outside the walls, and that just erodes all faith in government at every level," he said. "We can do better. We can be a more humane state. We can keep families and communities together, and that's the way Wisconsin can move forward."



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