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WPRI

Free-Market Paths to Better Lives



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New WPRI Special Report on Wisconsin's Corrections policy

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WPRI Calls for Corrections Reform

WPRI report highlights strategy for reducing recidivism through investment in work, training and re-entry programs; encourages use of social impact bonds

The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute today called for a new focus on reducing incarceration in Wisconsin through investment in work, training and re-entry programs, and the use of social impact bonds.

The institute's 50-page Special Report, "Unlocking Potential," is the first in an upcoming series of stories and policy papers that will focus on the repercussions of incarcerating nearly 23,000 inmates and supervising approximately 65,000 more currently on probation or parole.

"We lock up a lot of people in Wisconsin, and usually for good reason. For almost every prisoner, there is a victim," said WPRI President Mike Nichols. "But we don't and can't lock up every offender forever. Only one in 20 men, and even fewer women, are 'lifers.' The majority will be out in less than five years and return to the same neighborhoods where their victims often live."

"This is where we as a state so often fail. About 30 percent will end up back inside within three years. More can be done before they are released. More can be done to ensure they have a decent chance at rebuilding their lives, getting involved in the lives of their children and contributing to an economy that so badly needs them."

"So at WPRI, we've spent much of the past year looking around the country, and sometimes in our own backyard, at programs that are working or that hold promise but haven't been given the attention or resources to succeed."

The institute will have a variety of recommendations in the coming months for how the state can address its corrections dilemma. Today, the focus is on encouraging the state to invest in programs that work and also move forward with a social impact bond pilot program that could infuse private capital into initiatives that have a proven track record.

"Unlocking Potential" includes these stories:

- **"A historical policy dilemma"** and why Wisconsin cannot afford to stay the course on its corrections strategy, by Michael Flaherty and Mike Nichols
- **"Badger Bonds: A smart approach to reducing recidivism and increasing employment in Wisconsin,"** by Gerard Robinson, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.



- "**Giving Hope to Prisoners**," a profile of an innovative Nevada program that helps ex-inmates rejoin society, partly through the use of police officers as mentors.
- "**Breaking the cycle of abuse**," a profile of the Alma Center in Milwaukee and "trauma-informed healing."
- "**Private industry, prisons team up**," a look at how private companies set up shop inside prison walls and provide a bridge to the outside.
- "**Training for a new life**," a profile of Milwaukee Area Technical College's CNC program to help develop the "untapped talent pool" of ex-inmates.

Nichols presented the institute's initial findings to the 2016 Legislative Council Study Committee on Reducing Recidivism and Removing Impediments to Ex-Offender Employment, which recently made numerous recommendations to Gov. Scott Walker and the Legislature.

WPRI's Special Report is available at www.wpri.org. Media outlets interested in running stories from "Unlocking Potential" can contact WPRI editor Mabel Wong at mabel@wpri.org.

The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, established in 1987, is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit think tank working to engage Wisconsinites in discussions and timely action on key public policy issues critical to the state's future. The institute is guided by the belief that free markets, individual initiative, limited and efficient government and educational opportunity are keys to economic prosperity and human dignity.