

Executive Summary

We lock up a lot of people in Wisconsin, and usually for good reason. For almost every prisoner, there is a victim. 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.

We can't afford the status quo. We can't afford the cost, well over \$1 billion a year. We can't ignore 90,000 unfilled job listings in a state with, it turns out, about the same number of people in prison or under supervision. We can't afford the cycle of crime and victimization that has gone on for generations.

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. We didn't do it alone. We relied on the advice of people like Bob Woodson, the economic-opportunity crusader (to borrow a description from the Wall Street Journal) who has long advised Paul Ryan on how we can enable poor Americans to become agents of their own uplift.

Woodson pointed us to Jon Ponder, a former felon who founded Hope for Prisoners in Las Vegas. Others pointed us to Kansas, where private companies pay real wages to inmates working inside prison walls and provide a bridge to the outside. In Milwaukee, we profile the Alma Center, where efforts to break the cycle of domestic violence show such promise.

All this is good and well, you might say, but where does the money come from to support programs like Milwaukee JobsWork, the Joseph

Project or tech training for inmates? Where do we find the cash to maybe start up a chapter of Hope for Prisoners in Milwaukee or give the Alma Center the boost it needs?

Some of the programs we profile make convincing evidence-based arguments that they've been successful; others provide little more than promise but show what is possible. Some already receive tax dollars and should continue to; others have sprung up in civil society without the help or hindrance of government. What we need in Wisconsin is a way to ensure that any program we're going to invest in has the independently verified data to back up its claims. We need a way to leverage private capital to "bring the same level of focus and entrepreneurial dynamism that we see in the private sector," as one of our authors writes, to what is seen as a public-sector problem.

But we also need to acknowledge that government will always be the prime driver of corrections policy and funding and that it can more effectively and efficiently prepare inmates for successful re-entry into society.

We see a way: social impact bonds. We will have a variety of recommendations in the coming months for how the state can address the historical corrections dilemma. Today, our focus is on encouraging the state to use this novel tool to infuse private capital into programs that have a proven track record and, if they don't already exist in the state, to create them here.

We recommend taking a close look at work programs such as the one in Kansas and education programs such as Milwaukee Area Technical College's CNC training for offenders. We also believe the state should review and explore sentence adjustment mechanisms to see whether they can effectively be tied to participation in some of the programs we are highlighting.

We will always need to lock up those who hurt others. But we can't afford to lock up forever the potential of the prisoners who will return to society with, currently, little chance for success.

— *Mike Nichols, WPRI president*

Contributors

Michael Flaherty
Michael Jahr
Gerard Robinson
Marie Rohde
Joe Stumpe
Janet Weyandt
Mabel Wong, Editor

Photography

Ronda Churchill
Tom Lynn
Josh Pearce
Jeffrey Phelps
Joe Stumpe

Art Direction

Helf Studios

Board of Directors

CHAIRMAN:

Tom Howatt
David Baumgarten
Ave Bie
Catherine Dellin
Jon Hammes
Corey Hoze
Mike Jones
David Lubar
Bill Nasgovitz
Jim Nellen
Maureen Oster
Ulice Payne Jr.
Tim Sheehy
Mike Nichols, President

Contact Us

ADDRESS:

633 W. Wisconsin Ave.
Suite 330
Milwaukee, WI 53203

PHONE:

414.225.9940

EMAIL:

wpri@wpri.org

WEBSITE:

www.wpri.org

Social Media

Follow us on

FACEBOOK

TWITTER: @wpri



WPRI MISSION >

Founded in 1987, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) guided by the belief that free markets, individual initiative, limited and efficient government and educational opportunity are keys to economic prosperity and human dignity.