



EMBARGOED UNTIL: 12:01 a.m. ET, Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2019

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High Rates of Parole Supervision and Reincarceration Continue in Wisconsin

A new report by the Justice Lab at Columbia University confirms that over one-third of those entering Wisconsin prisons are incarcerated for technical violations.

Milwaukee – A [new report](#) released today by the Justice Lab at Columbia University has found that Wisconsin has unusually high rates of community corrections supervision and reincarceration, adding considerably to the state’s prison populations and costing Wisconsin taxpayers millions annually. Authors of *The Wisconsin Community Corrections Story*, Jarred Williams, Vincent Schiraldi and Kendra Bradner, concluded that:

- Wisconsin’s parole supervision rate is 1.5 times higher than the national average (453 vs. 303 per 100,000 adults), giving Wisconsin the seventh highest parole supervision rate nationally, highest among their neighboring states. Opposite of the national trend, parole supervision rates in Wisconsin continue to climb.
- Length of stay for parole in Wisconsin has sharply diverged from both national and regional trends. In 2016, the average length of stay for parole in Wisconsin was 1.7 times greater than the national average (38 months vs. 22 months), ranking Wisconsin third nationally in terms of length of time people spend under parole supervision. Only Alabama (48 months) and Oklahoma (40 months) rank higher.
- People who had previously been under community corrections supervision (probation and parole) made up *over half* of the total number of adults incarcerated in Wisconsin state prisons at the end of 2017.
- People incarcerated for a revocation *without* a new conviction made up over one-third (36%) of all prison admissions in Wisconsin in 2017. When people incarcerated on probation and parole “holds” are taken into account, this proportion increases to 54.5% of all prison admissions that year.
- Wisconsin has disproportionately high rates of community supervision (probation and parole), especially for Black and Native American men. One in eight Black men is under community supervision, more than five times the rate of white men in Wisconsin. One in 11 Native American men is under community supervision, four times the rate of white men in Wisconsin. Black women are supervised at over three times, and Native American women at over six times, the rate of white women.
- The vast majority of people incarcerated at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF) are there for technical violations or probation or parole “holds” – not for new crimes. **MSDF is the first facility in the nation built for this purpose, and has greatly expanded the state’s capacity to incarcerate people on community supervision.**

[The report](#) shows that this extraordinary level of community supervision is a deprivation of liberty in its own right and a significant contributor to incarceration in Wisconsin. In order to curb the use of probation and parole supervision in Wisconsin and concomitant violations and returns to prison, the report recommends that Wisconsin **policymakers shorten probation and parole terms and focus community resources on the first few years of supervision** when they have the greatest impact; **close the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility** and locate alternative programs in truly community-based settings; **provide “earned credit” time off supervision** as incentives to positive performance; **reduce returns to incarceration; reduce detention prior to reincarceration;** and **capture savings** from reduced incarceration costs and **use them to fund community-based supports** for the most impacted neighborhoods. National examples of each of these approaches are included in the report.

“Our report contains troubling findings that Wisconsin is wasting money and wasting lives by supervising and violating thousands of people not for new crimes, but for technical violations of supervision,” states **Vincent Schiraldi, co-director of the Columbia University Justice Lab and former Commissioner of New York City Probation**. “Wisconsin should now follow the example of dozens of states and focus community supervision resources on those most in need of it, stop returning people to prison for ‘ticky-tack’ rule violations, and use the savings from such reforms to fund programs and opportunities that help people turn their lives around.”

“The Columbia University Justice Lab report offers Wisconsin the hopeful opportunity to examine and reform the way we protect our communities in a more effective and just manner,” said **John Chisholm, Milwaukee County District Attorney**. “Community corrections should, whenever possible, reflect locally accountable ways to change harmful behaviors with the goal of returning people to full participation in the community.”

“The Columbia Justice Lab report makes it clear that a fundamental transformation of probation and parole is necessary not only in Wisconsin but across the country,” stated **DeAnna Hoskins, President and CEO of JustLeadershipUSA**, the organization that commissioned the report. “Too many people, but especially Black and Native communities in Wisconsin, have been disproportionately harmed. Their lived experience of neglect, economic exclusion, and even death is proof of the rampant civil and human rights abuses resulting from Wisconsin officials’ reliance upon overly punitive, ineffective practices. This must end. I am confident that impacted leaders in Wisconsin together with elected officials who recognize how the system has caused economic and racial inequities, and public health harms, will close MSDF (#CLOSEmsdf) and end crimeless revocation.”

“The Columbia Justice Lab has made a huge contribution with this report, clearly explaining both the scale of supervision and revocation in Wisconsin and the laws and practices that have enabled the results we see today,” said **Cecelia Klingele, associate professor at University of Wisconsin Law School**. “The report will inform policy conversations and community-based advocacy, allowing us to better understand what changes are needed to make our system more fair and more successful.”

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The [Justice Lab](#) combines original research, policy development, and community engagement to propel the project of justice reform. In our vision, justice depends on peaceful and healthy communities that help all their members to flourish in a climate of fairness and respect. We work for a community-centered justice, in which incarceration is no longer used as a solution to problems that are often rooted in poverty and racial inequality.