

Increase Access to Safe, Dignified and Supportive Housing

According to the WI Department of Corrections (6/2/2023), there are currently 21,194 people in their care, and 95% of these individuals will eventually return to their communities. In that same report, 51,018 individuals are under state supervision and are already in our communities. A list of collateral consequences comes with involvement with the criminal legal system. At the top of that list is reduced access to safe, dignified, and supportive housing.



To have better outcomes, healthier, safer communities, and break the generational cycle of incarceration, we must consider changing our approach. Supporting individuals while they re-enter society and helping them with their basic needs sets these individuals up for tremendous success and can reduce their likelihood of re-entering the criminal legal system. One of the most fundamental needs that can be addressed is the need for all people to have access to a safe place to live. In 2018, the Prison Policy Initiative highlighted that formerly incarcerated people are ten times more likely to be homeless. Sending individuals back into their communities unhoused can create more obstacles for them and result in returning to an unsupportive or unsafe environment that does not promote the person's ability to thrive.

The Community

Housing instability affects both formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. For instance, the Prison Policy Institute states that 80% of women in jail and 58% of women in prison are mothers. According to the WI Department of Corrections, 47.5% of women were released with unstable housing between 2016-2021. A significant portion of these women are mothers. Incarcerated mothers are disproportionately affected by unreliable housing, and the limited access to safe and supportive housing will directly impact their children. The National Institute on Justice Journal found that children of incarcerated individuals are 6.5 times more likely to end up incarcerated themselves. The first step to breaking the generational impact of incarceration is to provide services that address the basic needs of formerly incarcerated people re-entering their communities, such as providing reliable housing for themselves and their children.

How do we establish ourselves, move forward, reunite with our children, and productively participate in our communities? How do we "prove" ourselves to society when we cannot even secure a safe place to call home? Many want to be accepted into their communities with an opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. Human beings are motivated by their needs. We, as a marginalized population, are not different from anyone else. We should not be defined or held back by our greatest regret. Everyone deserves a place they can call home.

The Cost

In Wisconsin, we spend between \$36,000 and \$42,000 per person per year on incarceration. That is over \$3000 per month to house people in prison. What if a portion of those funds could be invested in creating safe, dignified, supportive housing? In Wisconsin, a modest

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apartment costs anywhere between \$700-\$1500 per month. The monetary savings alone is at least \$1500 per month. These savings do not include the fact that housing offers an opportunity to stabilize people and families, their tax contributions, and the overall contributions people are making to public safety and healthier communities.

We are asking that Wisconsin invest in people and public safety by diverting a portion of the money we spend on both incarcerating people and on probation, parole, or extended supervision and allocate these funds to create safe environments for people to call home when returning to their communities. In July 2019, the Post Crescent wrote that Wisconsin revocations for rule violations, not new crimes, are the number one cause of incarceration, accounting for 40% of new admissions. The cost to Wisconsin taxpayers is 147.5 million dollars. We can not help but recognize a correlation between housing instability and incarceration. We can create safer, healthier communities for all of us by creating new avenues for investments into safe, dignified and supportive housing.

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