ISSUE #4

JOSHUA

Justice Organization Sharing Hope & United for Action

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

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Transformational Justice: Progress & the Work Ahead

Hello Friends,

Over the past several months, we have seen important movement toward a more just and restorative Wisconsin. At JOSHUA, we think of **Transformational Justice** as more than responding to harm after it happens. It means looking honestly at the systems that contribute to harm, addressing the conditions that create cycles of incarceration and instability, and building pathways toward healing, accountability, restoration, and belonging.

There have been several important developments this year. In April, Gov. Tony Evers signed Executive Orders 287 and 288, reestablishing a formal commutation process in Wisconsin and creating a Commutation Advisory Board, including a process for certain juvenile life sentences. These orders create a pathway for people who have served substantial portions of their sentences to have their cases considered for commutation.

Another significant change is **2025 Wisconsin Act 233**, which allows eligible people who are incarcerated and qualify for Medicaid to receive certain Medicaid-covered services before release, including case management and behavioral-health treatment, along with a supply of medication to support continuity of care after release. These kinds of changes recognize something we have heard repeatedly through our reentry work: **successful reentry begins before someone walks out the prison gate.**

Wisconsin DOC continues to identify reentry as an important part of its work, noting that more than 95% of people incarcerated in Wisconsin will eventually return to their communities. DOC's Reentry Unit describes its work as beginning at admission and continuing through discharge, with programs intended to address treatment, education, employment, and other needs.

At the same time, **progress has been gradual**, and many of the changes we have advocated for remain unfinished. Our Transformational Justice work continues to push for stronger reentry supports, meaningful alternatives to incarceration, greater access to treatment, and policies that address the underlying causes of system involvement rather than simply increasing punishment.

As we approach the **November 3 gubernatorial election**, there is considerable uncertainty about what the next administration will mean for the future direction of Wisconsin's justice system. The governor has significant influence over appointments, executive priorities, agency direction, and the state's budget priorities. For our concerns within the Transformational Justice work, that could have real implications for issues including **commutations, TAD (Treatment Alternatives and Diversion) funding and policy, reentry services, treatment and mental-health supports, and other criminal justice priorities.**

That is why this moment matters. While some progress is happening now, **the work of transformation cannot depend on one election, one administration, or one policy change.** We need continued advocacy and the voices of people directly impacted by incarceration to remain part of the conversation.

We will continue advocating, listening, learning, and building relationships with people inside our prisons and jails, people returning home, families, faith communities, and organizations across Wisconsin. Transformation takes time—but every pathway we create toward healing, restoration, and belonging moves us closer to a justice system that truly serves our communities.

Sincerely,
The JOSHUA Transformational Justice Task Force

DOC FRIENDS & FAMILY ACTION PLAN FOR 2026

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections has been holding quarterly Friends & Family Forums to hear directly from families and people connected to incarcerated individuals. The 2026 Action Plan outlines areas where DOC has heard concerns and is working toward changes.

Some of the key areas include:

- Better communication: DOC is developing a new Friends & Family Guide and improving its website to make information easier to find and more reliable.
- More consistency between prisons: DOC is reviewing visitation, property, programming, and other policies to reduce differences between facilities.
- Programming & reentry: DOC has expanded some programming, including ERP opportunities and the Edovo educational platform, and is reviewing how release planning can better involve families and people with lived experience.
- Family reentry support: One community corrections office has started monthly Family Reentry Meetings to help families understand supervision expectations and connect with community resources. DOC is considering expanding this model statewide.
- Community connections: DOC says it is exploring dedicated community resources for people returning from incarceration.
- Mental health & wellness: DOC is working on recommendations related to mental health and medical care and is expanding peer-support opportunities across facilities.
- Food & nutrition: DOC hired a Dietetic Director and is developing standardized menus intended to provide more nutritionally balanced meals.
- Lived experience: A Reentry Executive Team subcommittee plans to engage people with lived experience and/or people currently incarcerated in examining the reentry process.

The bigger Transformational Justice takeaway: DOC's plan shows that some changes are moving forward, but many remain in the "exploring," "reviewing," or "next steps" stage. Continued advocacy and meaningful involvement from incarcerated people, families, and community organizations will be important in turning these commitments into lasting changes.

RECOVERY–REENTRY COMMUNITY COALITION

The Recovery–Reentry Community Coalition is a newer Fox Valley–area network, launched in 2025, bringing together advocates, people with lived experience, community organizations, service providers, and others working to strengthen pathways to recovery and successful reentry. The coalition grew from many ESTHER (affiliate of WISDOM like JOSHUA) members and partners helping to bring the effort together. JOSHUA is connected as a regional outreach resource.

Since forming, coalition members have met with dozens of organizations and agencies throughout the Fox Valley to build a growing, comprehensive network of resources for people affected by substance use, mental health challenges, incarceration, and the legal system. One of the coalition's goals is making it easier for people to find the right person or organization when they need help. Their developing resource network connects people with recovery organizations, reentry services, advocates, case workers, community supports, and other regional partners who can help people navigate life before and after incarceration.

The coalition has also begun an email newsletter sharing recovery resources, educational opportunities, community events, and legislative information related to recovery, reentry, mental health, substance use, and the legal system. For anyone preparing to return home, or supporting someone who is, this growing network can be a helpful place to find community connections and resources.

RE COMMUNITY COALITION
Recovery • Reentry • Restart • Refresh • Redemption

OTHER NEWS...

BREAKING BARRIERS: UW-GREEN BAY CELEBRATES HISTORIC FIRST BACHELOR'S GRADUATES AT OAKHILL CORRECTIONAL



In May, UW–Green Bay celebrated a historic milestone at Oakhill Correctional Institution: the first incarcerated students in more than 50 years to earn UW bachelor's degrees entirely inside a Wisconsin prison. Twenty-three students received associate and bachelor's degrees, including bachelor's degrees in Organizational Leadership, through a partnership between UW–Green Bay, the UW Coalition for Higher Education in Prison, and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. The achievement is a powerful example of what can happen when people are given meaningful opportunities to learn, grow, and prepare for life beyond incarceration. As one graduate shared, "I feel like I have a future now."

A PROCESS TO APPLY FOR COMMUTATIONS HAS BEEN OPENED BACK UP AFTER 50 YEARS

In April 2026, Governor Tony Evers signed Executive Orders 287 and 288, restoring Wisconsin's gubernatorial commutation process and establishing a new Commutation Advisory Board—the first such process restored in Wisconsin since the Thompson administration. Applications are now open for eligible people currently incarcerated in Wisconsin who have served at least half of their sentence (or at least 20 years of a life sentence) and meet additional eligibility requirements. The Board began hearing and interviewing applicants in September, with its first publicly noticed meeting held September 18, 2026.

Connect with the statewide coalition, Justice Forward Wisconsin, for help filling out the application at commutations@justiceforwardwi.org for those not incarcerated. And tell those who are incarcerated and need help to contact hello@weareprosay.org to find out how to get any assistance or send us their application to review, provide feedback on, and even submit it for free. They assist with reentry plans and help with explaining why a person should be granted a commutation.



DEMANDING DIGNITY BEHIND BARS

In July, the WISDOM Transformational Justice Coalition gathered outside the Wisconsin Department of Corrections in Madison for the "Demand Dignity Behind Bars" rally, calling attention to overcrowding and conditions inside Wisconsin prisons. Advocates highlighted the need for humane conditions of confinement, access to medical care, clean water, outdoor recreation and programming, stronger family connections, and greater accountability within DOC. The coalition also called for limiting prolonged solitary confinement and ending the use of "convictionless revocations" that return people to prison for alleged violations of supervision. The concerns raised at the rally have continued to be reflected in Wisconsin's growing prison population. In August, Wisconsin's prison population reached a record 23,854 people which is nearly 6,000 above the system's intended capacity. The conversation remains about addressing mass incarceration as overcrowding has placed additional strain on staffing, programming, and reentry opportunities.

RESOURCES

Green Bay Dream Center



PHONES FOR THOSE REENTERING SOCIETY

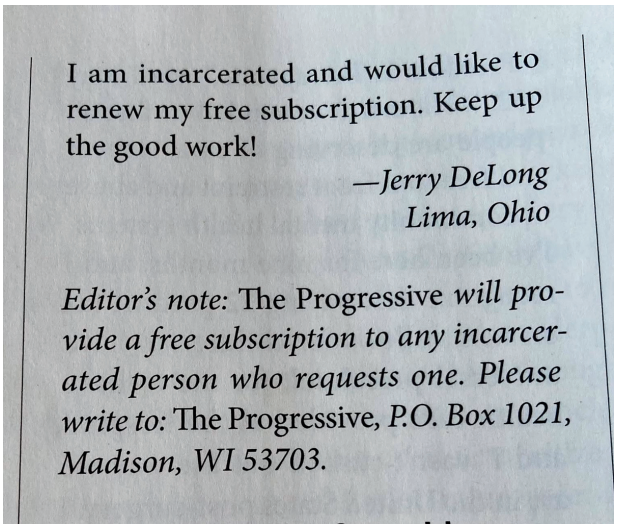
You are eligible for a free phone if you are on: probation/parole/extended supervision, homeless, and/or assist those who are affected by any of those listed. Let's take care of our communities.

The Foundation for Rural Housing runs this fresh start cell phone program.

https://www.ffrh.org/fresh-start

EMAIL: wrh@wisconsinruralhousing.org

FREE SUBSCRIPTION



I am incarcerated and would like to renew my free subscription. Keep up the good work!

—Jerry DeLong
Lima, Ohio

Editor's note: The Progressive *will provide a free subscription to any incarcerated person who requests one. Please write to:* The Progressive, *P.O. Box 1021, Madison, WI 53703.*

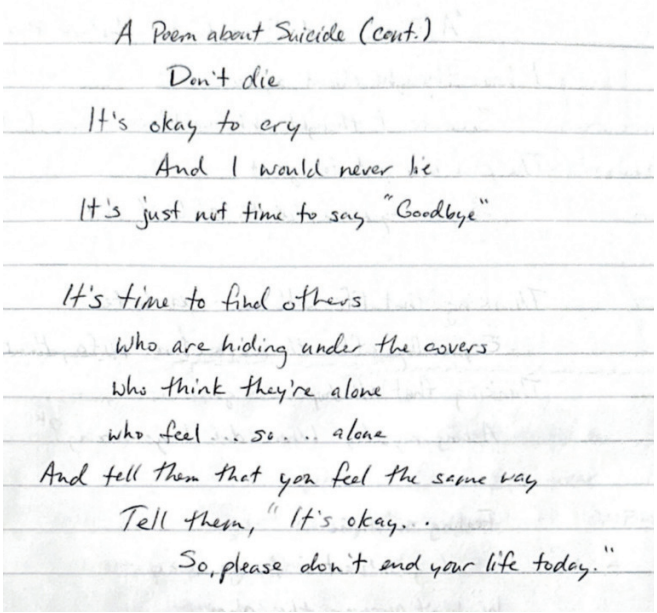
THE JOSEPH PROJECT

Joseph Project is a faith-based initiative connecting people to direct-hire jobs. Participants attend a one week go-to-work training program where participants are taught people skills, interview skills, given transportation, and any needed workwear. Graduates are then offered an interview with companies looking to hire. Transportation to the job is typically provided if there are enough volunteers in the specific region. Milwaukee and Green Bay, WI are the current programs that are operating. Anyone is welcome to be a part of this training program for hire as long as there is seriousness about employment.

Green Bay: esmallsjr@gatewaycollective.org

Milwaukee: JosephProjectJobs@gmail.com

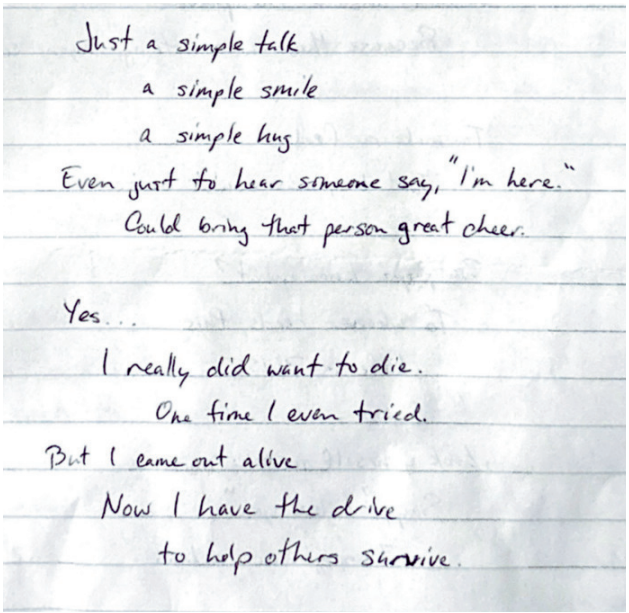
A POEM BY MELSON, *a fellow incarcerated individual*



A Poem about Suicide (cont.)

Don't die
It's okay to cry
And I would never lie
It's just not time to say "Goodbye"

It's time to find others
Who are hiding under the covers
Who think they're alone
who feel ... so ... alone
And tell them that you feel the same way
Tell them, "It's okay..
So, please don't end your life today."



Just a simple talk
a simple smile
a simple hug
Even just to hear someone say, "I'm here."
Could bring that person great cheer.

Yes...
I really did want to die.
One time I even tried.
But I came out alive
Now I have the drive
to help others survive.