



BUILDING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

PRIORITIES FOR WISCONSIN
2023-2025

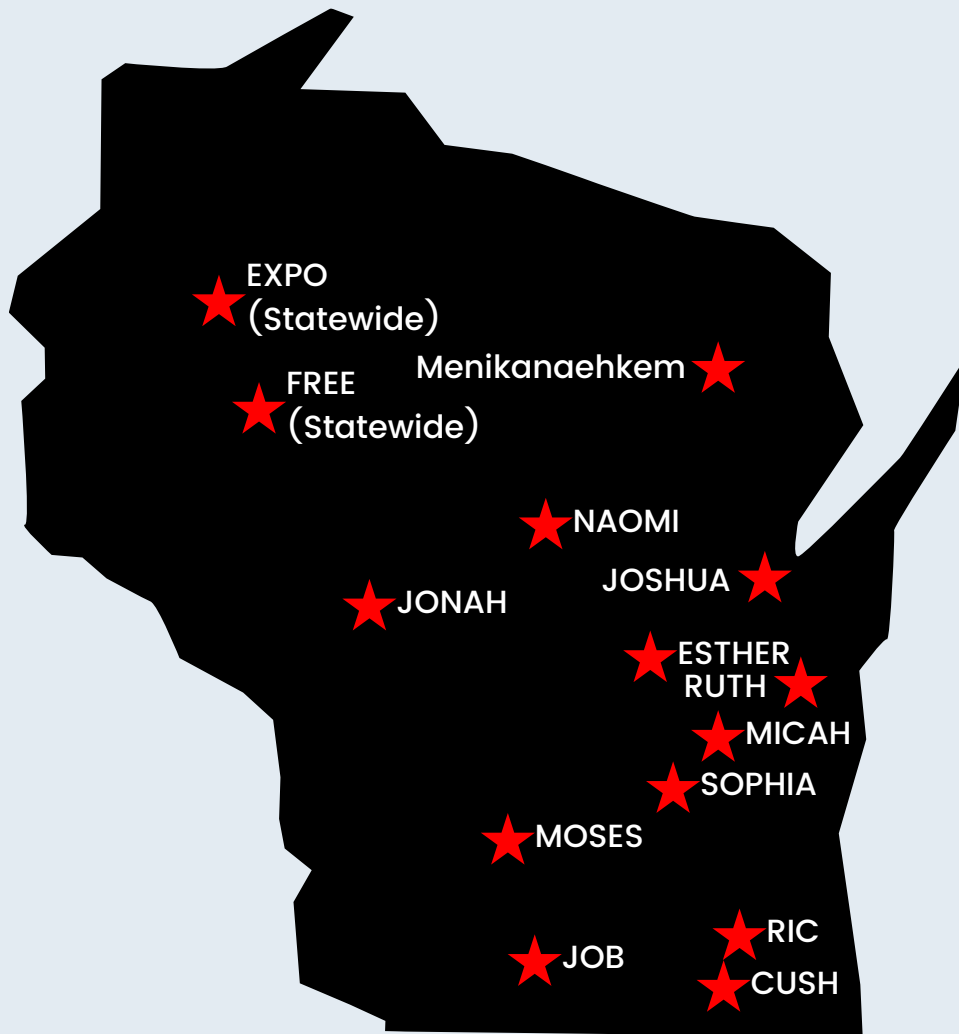


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Dear Beloved Community Members,

We join together as WISDOM, a network of people seeking the common good. We are a community seeking to be radically inclusive, cultivating relationships across racial, ethnic, religious, class and gender lines. We practice costly reconciliation in recognizing past injustices and actively repairing these open wounds that perpetuate inequity today. WISDOM is committed to just change that brings health and stability for the second, third and seventh generation to come.

From many places, perspectives, and traditions we join as the Beloved Community.

We join together in these shared values as an opposing vision competes for Wisconsin's attention. A rising tide of White "Christian" Nationalism (WCN) is informing public discourse and policy. WCN is an old, familiar friend of white supremacy and racism. "White 'Christian' Nationalism is a political ideology and religious heresy based on the belief that this country was founded as and should be a 'Christian' nation, must adhere to a distorted version of 'Christian' values, and should perpetuate White 'Christian' domination." [1] WCN shows up in hate groups that violently attack religious, racial and ethnic minorities. More quietly WCN nurtures fear and mistrust of all efforts toward diversity, equity and inclusion, normalizes and condones police violence towards black and brown people, and seeks to cement structural racism.

WISDOM is called to resist such destructive forces. WISDOM is called to live into a different vision we call the Beloved Community. We must amplify our voice for the multi-faith, multi-racial, multi-ethnic community we value. We are called to labor for the Beloved Community that comes into being when everyone receives good healthcare, when criminal legal systems are dramatically transformed, as we think enough of future generations to protect our children from lead poisoning, as we honor the dignity of immigrants and other marginalized groups.

We must answer the call to further embody the Beloved Community. We must be louder and bolder with our vision for justice. This involves getting ourselves trained and developing our own leadership capacity. This calling means reaching out to invite new people to join in this work. We are called to build community by listening to one another and making space at the table for people from all walks of life.

Will you answer the call to be about the work of the Beloved Community?

In Solidarity,
Rev. Marian Boyle-Rohloff, WISDOM President

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

ABOUT WISDOM

In 2000, volunteers and organizers from southeast Wisconsin realized that it was essential to do outreach across the whole state to accomplish their goal of advocating for justice. WISDOM was born! WISDOM has since grown into a powerful voice in Wisconsin, with affiliates in cities from Kenosha to Green Bay and Manitowoc to Eau Claire. Other affiliates include the statewide organizations, EXPO (EX-incarcerated People Organizing) and FREE, and Menikanaehkem. WISDOM is by far the largest state group in Gamaliel. Within Gamaliel, WISDOM initiated the issues of immigration and transformational justice. WISDOM partners with such groups as the Wisconsin Council of Churches, NAACP, and Citizen Action of Wisconsin on issues that affect our communities.

WISDOM organizes a biennial day of advocacy at the Capitol and WISDOM representatives testify at every state budget hearing. WISDOM and its C4 arm, the WISDOM Action Network, are leaders in voter engagement efforts. WISDOM and its affiliates work on issues as diverse as housing, hunger, voter engagement, health, environmental justice and the rights of nature, public transportation, and the reform of immigration and criminal legal systems. It is our ultimate goal to change ourselves, our own organizations, and with the leadership of Gamaliel, our country; to end systemic racism and discrimination of all kinds and to truly become the Beloved Community.

WISDOM believes that faith communities are called to stand with people who have suffered injustice and that the people most impacted by the issues need to lead our response. EXPO is a large and growing part of WISDOM. EXPO and FREE members are formerly incarcerated men and women who have come together to offer mutual positive support, and to lead in the struggle for change in the criminal legal system.

WISDOM's best-known work is our Transformational Justice Campaign. This campaign calls for a drastic reduction in our incarceration rates and racial disparities. WISDOM and Gamaliel have stood with and for immigrants for many years by educating, advocating and acting together with our newest neighbors for policies that express our compassion and respect for all people.

RACIAL EQUITY STATEMENT

Racial equity is a core value of WISDOM and its affiliates and is practiced in everything we do.

- Diverse voices, viewpoints, opinions, thoughts, and ideas are actively encouraged and embraced throughout our organization.
- A culture of deep and authentic relationships throughout WISDOM and its affiliates fosters a sense of restored community and mutual caring.
- Our commitment to racial equity promotes a just, fair, respectful, inclusive, and thriving community for everyone in our organization and in the institutions, we seek to improve.

WISDOM and its affiliates, and participants individually, are open and responsive to constructively given feedback about racist attitudes or behaviors we may display, however unintentional.

- Mistakes are courageously and forthrightly identified. We will graciously “call each other in” and describe and discuss mistakes with clarity as part of a continuous education process.
- Patience, genuine caring, and compassionate listening are practiced in our mutual effort to understand oppression, both overt and systemic.

WISDOM and its affiliates are characterized by an intentional identity as an antiracist institution.

- Our antiracist identity permeates our organizational culture, values, norms, and behaviors.
- Diverse racial, cultural, and economic groups enjoy full participation and shared power in all aspects of our mission, structure, constituency, policies, and practices.
- People of color lead in the work we do and are always at the tables where decisions that affect us get made.

WISDOM'S PROPEHTIC DECLARATION

We are people of faith united by our passion for justice, commitment to community and a practice of hope. We stand together understanding that our lives and destinies are intertwined.

- We come together because God calls us into relationship with one another, with our communities and with the world around us.
- We come together from across the state, across faith traditions, across race, class, gender and ethnicity, and across many divides that might ordinarily keep us apart.
- We come together around core faith convictions that affirm our direction and shape our vision for the future.
- We come together to act for justice, build power and to transform our communities, cities and state.

We stand together in our faith:

- We believe in the God-given dignity and infinite worth of each and every human life
- We believe that we are each and all part of a sacred community, to which we have responsibility and from which we gain sustenance.
- We believe that our faith calls us to work for justice and liberation, standing against all forms of oppression and inequity.
- We believe we are called to be stewards of the natural world in all its bounty and diversity.
- We believe in shared abundance and stand against the dominant culture of reckless consumption and consumerism for some and deprivation for others.
- We believe in the triumph of love and hope over hate and fear.

We build power and act together, drawing courage and inspiration from our faith. We believe God has called us to live, speak and act courageously in accordance with our faith beliefs. Together we will create the community we seek for ourselves, but also build the power we need to transform the world around us. We will build the relationships and strategic capacity we need to powerfully engage and impact public decisions.

Together we declare:

Where there is division, we declare unity.

Where there is hatred, we declare love.

Where there is lack, we declare abundance.

Where there is desolation, we declare renewal.

Where there is discouragement, we declare hope.

Where there is lack of strength, we declare power!

IVE

INTEGRATED VOTER ENGAGEMENT

IVE ensures that basic civic participation is integrated through all WISDOM's issue advocacy work. The driving beliefs are:

- Elections are moments to catalyze and build year-around organizing focused on issues that are meaningful to the people of the community as well as the organization.
- Commitment to focus on unlikely voters. These tend to be younger voters, people of color and unmarried women (The New American Majority)
- Intention to focus on quality and quantity of contacts made.
- Commitment to building long-term relationships outside of electoral cycle/ base-building and turning out our base to vote.

IVE engages people by connecting issues to the political process and opportunities to use elections to move our long-term agenda. We talk about the political process in every aspect of our issues and organizing, including criminal legal system reform, education, youth and young adult organizing, jobs and the economy, transportation and multi-cultural Immigration.

Elections impact every facet of life - criminal justice, health care, the economy, our environment, public education, equal rights, and more. When making a decision about voting, people trust information from people they know. This is why we equip, engage and empower people to help turn out more Wisconsin people to the polls. IVE relies on the power of personal connections to drive civic engagement:

- The Relational Voter Program (RVP) uses a smartphone app. Participants receive election updates from us and have regular touch-ins with the people on their list, encouraging them to vote in whatever manner they usually connect - text, email, phone conversation, etc.
- Canvassers across the WISDOM network visit door-to-door on an on-going basis with timely information to build relationships, help people make their election decisions, and stay on top of community issues.
- The incarcerated Prison Outreach Teams also receive timely information, and commit to reach out regularly to loved ones on the outside, encouraging them to participate in voting and legislative outreach.

IVE is the backdrop of all WISDOM's social change efforts. Contact office@wisdomwisconsin.org to get involved!

OUR VALUES

Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.

~ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Since WISDOM came together in 2000, its affiliate members across Wisconsin have valiantly fought to “bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice” on issues ranging from mass incarceration and mistreatment of immigrants to generational poverty and environmental degradation.

In doing this work, we can sometimes get caught up in the details of our current fights and forget that at our core, we are called first and most of all to co-create the Beloved Community and achieve lasting change. To this end, we must transform ourselves and our organizations.

Whatever the specific issues of the day, our actions and advocacy reflect our three guiding values:

- Radical Inclusion
- Costly Reconciliation
- Living for the Seventh Generation

Radical Inclusion

At its core, “radical inclusion” means that, in the Beloved Community, everybody’s in/nobody’s out. While that seems a simple goal, our daily experience shows us how difficult it is to achieve. As human beings, we are wired to accept as “safe” those who look, act and talk like us, and to be wary of, if not hostile to, those who don’t.

To be truly inclusive, we must be willing to stand up for the radical belief that no one can decide who is worthy of inclusion and who is not. Yet we make these decisions every day. When we advocate on behalf of people who have committed “non-violent” offenses, we risk drawing a line that implies that people who commit “violent” crimes are less worthy of our compassion and support. When we focus our attention on transit in specific neighborhoods, we may forget that there are individuals across town – immigrants, the elderly, and those with disabilities – who also lack access to affordable transportation. And when we advocate for those who are incarcerated by the criminal legal system, that worthy focus should not blind us to the fact that thousands of immigrants, including children, are also being imprisoned without due process.

OUR VALUES

Costly Reconciliation

South African theologian and leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, “True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness, which is costly.” The call of reparative justice and reconciliation is not to forgive and forget, as if nothing wrong ever happened. Instead, true reconciliation requires a full understanding of both the details and consequences of injustice. “True reconciliation,” Tutu reminds us, “exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt and the truth.” He continues, “It is a risky undertaking, but in the end, it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing.”

Individuals who come from backgrounds of privilege often believe there are easy answers to problems such as racism, child poverty, immigration or mass incarceration. The call to reconciliation requires a reckoning with generational exploitation and lived realities. Systemic injustices that have been shaped over generations will require deep and sustained commitment to reconciliation for healing to occur.

To achieve real healing, we try to do these three things:

- Practice deep listening and unequivocal forgiveness
- Work to repair the damage done by years of injustice
- Build lasting bridges across the racial, geographic, religious and other divides that separate us.

As another South African, author and anti-apartheid activist Alan Paton, put it: We must “...*‘forgive and go forward’, building on the mistakes of the past and the energy generated by reconciliation to create a new future.*”

OUR VALUES

Living for the Seventh Generation

According to Wilma Mankiller, the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, "In Iroquois society, leaders are encouraged to remember seven generations in the past and consider seven generations in the future when making decisions that affect the people."

Most of us are unlikely to ever meet individuals who are separated from us by more than four generations, yet we have an obligation to think about how the decisions we make today will affect not only them but their children's children – the seventh generation. In a society that rewards short term thinking - sound bytes - over long-term thinking, velocity over value and convenience over conscience, trying to stay cognizant of the seventh generation is clearly swimming against the tide. But we must do it, both in our everyday lives and in our social justice advocacy.

We are already reaping the consequences of short-term thinking in the treatment of our air, water and land and the habitats of other living things. We also know that the impacts of climate change are being felt first by the poorest among us and will exacerbate the challenges they face.

Our work also requires us to intentionally bring the future to bear in our present. For example, when we advocate for educational opportunity for all, we should consider not only the needs of today's children but also their children – and their children's children. Similarly, when we work for criminal legal system reform, we remember that incarceration affects generations of families.

We need to also lay the groundwork today for those who, we hope, will continue to try to "bend the arc" after we are gone. Organizations, if they turn into institutions, ultimately die of their own weight. If we want future generations to use WISDOM and our affiliates as effective vehicles for organizing and advocacy, we must make decisions today that will ensure that the organization is flexible and ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

WISDOM AFFILIATES

WISDOM is the statewide network of faith-based organizations, which began with MICAH's founding in 1988. WISDOM has grown to include:

- MICAH (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope)
- RIC (Racine Interfaith Coalition)
- CUSH (Congregations United to Serve Humanity – Kenosha County)
- JOB (Justice Overcoming Borders – Beloit)
- ESTHER (Empowerment Solidarity Truth Hope Equity Reform – Fox Valley)
- SOPHIA (Stewards of Prophetic Hopeful Intentional Action – Waukesha County)
- JONAH (Joining Our Neighbors, Advancing Hope – Eau Claire)
- JOSHUA (Justice Organization Sharing Hope & United for Action – Green Bay)
- NAOMI (North central Area congregations Organizing to Make Impact – Wausau)
- RUTH (Responding with Understanding, Truth and Hope – Manitowoc)
- MOSES (Madison Organizing in Strength, Equity and Solidarity)
- Menikanaehkem (“Community Re-Builders” – Menominee Reservation)
- EXPO (EX-incarcerated People Organizing, Statewide)
- FREE (Statewide)

WISDOM is part of the national Gamaliel Network, which has organizations in 14 states.

Gamaliel's mission is "to empower ordinary people to effectively participate in the political, environmental, social and economic decisions affecting their lives. Learn more about Gamaliel at gamaliel.org.



2821 Vel R. Phillips Ave., Ste
213
Milwaukee, WI 53212

MICAHA (MILWAUKEE INNER-CITY CONGREGATIONS ALLIED FOR HOPE)

MICAHA is a multi-racial, interfaith organization committed to justice issues of greatest importance to Milwaukee residents.

We build power to transform the world as it is into a new world envisioned by people of faith.

We recognize the historic and present violations of racism and systemic sins against people and our values. In response, we commit to a long-term agenda that creates structural and racial equity, builds the peoples' control of the economy, and expands the public sphere. Together we act boldly and defiantly to call out "empire", to dismantle structural racism and poverty, and to establish the Beloved Community.



Rev. Joe and Joyce Ellwanger had a history of social justice activism long before they moved to Milwaukee, having worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Birmingham and with the national voting rights campaign. As the pastoral team at Crossroads Lutheran Church, among many other activities, they were founders of MICAHA.

Pastor Joe has been the driving force of WISDOM's efforts to end mass incarceration in Wisconsin. Joyce drives the work around efforts to increase access to public transportation.

They frequently appear in Milwaukee-area and Wisconsin wide efforts to pursue justice. They provide and serve as models for the spiritual foundations of our work. MICAHA and WISDOM are better organizations thanks to the presence of Joyce and Joe Ellwanger!

Connect with us



MicahEmpowers



office@micahmke.org



www.micahmke.org



(414) 264-0805



2302A DeKoven Ave.
Racine, WI 53406

RIC (RACINE INTERFAITH COALITION)

Racine Interfaith Coalition is 30 years old in 2023! We are composed of 26 diverse congregations including Christian, Unitarian, Judaism, and Muslim. The Racine Hospitality Center and the Burlington Coalition for Dismantling Racism are also included among our members.

We have worked on a variety of issues over the course of our history, including housing needs, education, health, mentoring youth.

In addition to creating "Turn Up The Vote" to promote voting in Racine, we have worked to establish a Drug and Alcohol Court and subsequently to expand it. Every time a violent death occurs in our city, we continue to host prayer vigils because every death deserves to be acknowledged and mourned.



Dr. Stephanie Mitchell is a parishioner at Emaus ELCA in Racine, a member of Racine Interfaith Coalition's Immigration Task Force, and the director of its Immigration Legal Services Initiative. In her day job, she is the Valor Distinguished Chair in Humanities on the history faculty at Carthage College where she teaches and researches Latin American History. For the past few years, Stephanie has been working towards achieving Department of Justice Recognition for RIC to be able to offer immigration legal services like applying for citizenship, applying for DACA renewal, or a work permit. Recently, RIC received the news from the DOJ that our offices have been approved to offer these services. Thanks to a start-up grant, we look forward to opening our doors later this year for a legal clinic on alternate Saturdays at the RIC office.

Connect with us

-  [ricracine](#)
-  [racineinterfaithcoalition](#)
-  ricracine1993@gmail.com
-  www.ricracine.org
-  (262) 635-9532

CUSH (CONGREGATIONS UNITED TO SERVE HUMANITY)

We are an interfaith, nonpartisan coalition whose mission is to live our faith and values in pursuit of justice through advocacy, education, and empowerment. In 2000, ten congregations officially formed CUSH. We continue to learn to use congregation-based community organizing to build power as we seek equity and justice.

Today, we have 16 congregations that are affiliated with CUSH. We are currently...

- advocating for an inpatient mental health facility
- addressing discrimination against our LGBTQ+ citizens
- working to move our bus transit hub to a more user-friendly location
- dealing with current issues around immigration, such as driver's licenses for those who undocumented

During this past winter, we addressed antisemitism through our Religious Leaders Caucus by starting a rapid response team to clear targeted neighborhoods that were littered by antisemitic propaganda. CUSH won an award from the Anti-Defamation League for our efforts.







P.O. Box 1324
Kenosha, WI 53140



CUSH President, Rabbi Dena Feingold, and the Chair of the Religious Leaders Caucus, Rev. Kevin Beebe.

Rev. Kevin and his spouse, Rev. Kelsey Beebe, are expecting their first child in May. One of the reasons that Kevin has become involved in the work of CUSH very early in his ministry in Kenosha is that he is seeking a more just and equitable community in which to raise and nurture his family.

Connect with us

-  CUSHKenosha
-  cushkenosha@gmail.com
-  www.cushkenosha.com
-  (262) 358-6449



P.O. Box 1353
Beloit, WI 53512-1353

JOB (JUSTICE OVERCOMING BORDERS)

JOB promotes the dismantling of systemic racism and provides educational opportunities for organizations and the general public in Beloit and Rock County.

The dismantling of systemic racism frames all of our work, which includes:

- Participating in Integrated Voter Engagement, by holding candidate forums for local elections
 - Developing a strategic plan for our work on racism and participating in a coalition that addresses concerns of race and equity in the schools.
 - Leading *Lest We Forget-The Great Migration of African Americans to Beloit, Wisconsin* events
 - Advocating for a position of treatment coordinator be added to assist Rock County Jail inmates who are ineligible for RECAP (Rock County Educational and Criminal Addictions Program)
 - Coordinating with the Poor People's Campaign and the Building Unity Tour
 - Screening the film *Who We Are – A Chronicle of Racism in America* and providing an interactive experience for the audience on systemic racism
- 101

All of our work would not have been possible without the help and dedication of volunteers and leaders, under the leadership of President Ruth Kolpack who passed away in 2022.



One of the individuals who contributed to JOB's beginning 20 years ago was Ruth Kolpack.

Ruth was motivated by her Catholicism. She firmly thought that in order to live out her faith, she had to devote her time, talent, and efforts to projects that not only reduced human suffering but also changed the systems that underpin so much of it.

Even as cancer took its toll, she remained active, participating in events, meetings and Zoom calls up until a few months before her death on October 16, 2022.

Connect with us



[justiceovercomingborders](#)



justiceovercomingborders@charter.net



www.justiceovercomingborders.org



262-635-9532

ESTHER (EMPOWERMENT SOLIDARITY TRUTH HOPE EQUITY REFORM)



P.O. Box 784
Neenah, WI 54957

ESTHER held its founding Covenanting Event on November 7th, 2004, with six faith communities participating. ESTHER focuses our work in the Fox Valley region of Wisconsin.

ESTHER aims to bring together people of faith to build community and to identify and act on issues of injustice. We work with congregations and individuals in collaboration with community partners and public officials to ensure that all people can have a voice and role in bringing about strong and just communities.

We seek to:

- Bring healing and unity as an interfaith community that reaches beyond the divisions of race, creed, and socio-economic status
- Build solid relationships with one another and with community leaders
- Identify and address root causes of poverty, oppression, and injustice
- Be agents of change that unite the community and spread a message of hope
- Work at local, state, and national levels to promote justice
- Empower people to overcome injustices and respond to the social-justice concerns of people in the communities of the Fox Valley



Connect with us



[esther.foxvalley](#)



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office@esther-foxvalley.org



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SOPHIA (STEWARDS OF PROPHETIC HOPEFUL INTENTIONAL ACTION)

SOPHIA covenanted in April 2004, with 10 member congregations. The efforts of devoted leaders, assistance from WISDOM, and the development of partnerships have paid off. SOPHIA is now recognized and valued as a voice of faith for justice.

Currently, the Criminal Justice Task Force is strategizing with our established partners to re-shape sentencing options for judges to use under Huber Law. The Huber facility is about 100 years old, and will be shuttered by 2024. SOPHIA will provide input for creating the new plan and work in the community to ensure that the plan approved is just, serves the needs of all citizens, and saves precious tax dollars.

The Immigration Task Force has addressed Waukesha County being the only county whose sheriff sent staff to be trained as ICE agents, fought against deputies stopping people for 'driving while brown/black', and is continuing the fight for Wisconsin Drivers Cards.

SOPHIA initiated a Racial Equity Team to ensure that Racial Equity is considered in every action taken by all Task Forces and within the Board. Board members are currently participating in extensive racial equity training.



Betty Groenewold started with SOPHIA early in its planning stages and was instrumental in SOPHIA's initial covenanting. In the past 20 years, she has served as President, worked on multiple committees (often willing to chair), led task forces, and guided many successful initiatives.

Betty always keeps her faith values of social justice at the forefront of her actions and relationships. She feels called to this work. Betty effectively builds relationships with those impacted by injustice, with elected officials, and with public policy decision-makers.

Connect with us



sophiawaukesha



admin@sophiawaukesha.org



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505 S. Dewey St., Suite #204
Mailbox 10
Eau Claire, WI 54701

JONAH (JOINING OUR NEIGHBORS ADVANCING HOPE)





JONAH exists to deepen relationships within and among faith communities and partner organizations to empower people in addressing the root causes of social injustice in the greater community.

Since 2007, we have been organizing diverse people in the Chippewa Valley and in Western WI around these common values: radical inclusivity, love, reconciliation, living for the future, environmentalism. We believe that impacted voices need to be lifted up and can teach us how to better address issues of injustice. We believe many voices together have the solution to building a beloved community.

Task Forces:

- Affordable Housing
- Child Poverty
- Environmental
- Immigration
- Justice Action Team
- Mental Health
- Religious Leaders
- Rural Outreach
- Transportation

Connect with us

-  jonahcv
-  cvjonahorganizer@gmail.com
-  www.jonahjustice.org
-  (715) 497-8732



My name is Perla Martinez-Beltran. I work in communications with JONAH and have been a part of the immigration task force both in JONAH and statewide since 2019. I have found JONAH to have a group of people who truly care for you, try to understand your situation and are willing to stand by you in a time of need. I have a lot of lived experience with family separation and I do not want families to continue to be separated because I know how it feels. Being a part of JONAH gives me the opportunity to voice my experience to advocate for myself and others with similar experiences. I have gained a lot of clarity and courage when I tell my story and I hope I can help others with my story and to let them know they are not alone and together we can make a difference.

JOSHUA (JUSTICE ORGANIZATION SHARING HOPE & UNITED FOR ACTION)



130 Saint Matthews St.
Green Bay, WI 54301

JOSHUA began in 2004 when various faith communities united to work towards social justice in the greater Green Bay Area. JOSHUA experiences the amazing possibilities when these communities join together to overcome divisions and stand united for action.

Through targeted issue campaigns, we promote the values of radical inclusion and lasting peace, inviting people of all walks of life to collaborate toward action that brings about lasting change in our communities.

JOSHUA inspires and equips people to work together on systemic justice issues, build relationships, and advance issues aligning with our core value: affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every human being.

We believe in equity, education, advocacy, racial and social justice, and community and relationship building.

We embody the hope that community-enhancing changes are possible.

Connect with us



joshua4justice



joshua4justice



joshua4justice@gmail.com



www.joshua4justice.org



(920) 327-0251



Jim Cairns has been a long-time supporter, sustainer, and leader of JOSHUA. He is the chair of the Transformational Justice Task Force in Green Bay. He has been at the forefront of much of JOSHUA's work surrounding the criminal legal system.

Through JOSHUA and the WISDOM network, Jim saw a way to be a part of the solution for systemic inequities. He brings outstanding leadership and kindness to the table, and we are blessed to have him.

"A lifetime concern, my retirement afforded me an opportunity to more actively focus on these issues. I have been very fortunate in my life, and I believe 'there but for the grace of God go I.'"

NAOMI (NORTH CENTRAL AREA CONGREGATIONS ORGANIZED TO MAKE AN IMPACT)



330 McClellan St.
Wausau, WI 54403

We chartered in January 2010, under the tutelage and encouragement of Pastor Joe Ellwanger who answered our call to come to Wausau to help a group of interested citizens fight a proposal for a new Marathon County jail. A Treatment Instead of Prison (TIP) task force preceded our charter as an affiliate.

We began with strong clergy leaders and dedicated members involved in transit issues, needed dental care for low-income residents, immigration reform, child poverty, diversity and inclusion, continuing TIP, and adding environmental justice.

We are presently re-connecting with our eight member congregations through listening sessions and an issues assembly. We are in a season of listening and possibility, working to revitalize our organization.

Connect with us



NAOMI4Justice



naomi4justice@yahoo.com



www.naomiwausau.org



(920) 327-0251



Rabbi Benjamin Altshuler is an emerging leader in NAOMI! He has served Mount Sinai Congregation and the Jewish communities of the Northwoods since his ordination in 2020 from Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion. Rabbi Altshuler's passion for social justice was kindled during his year of service with AVODAH, of which he is now an advisor on the Rabbinic Council. Recently, Rabbi Altshuler has pursued projects including hosting a voter registration drive, raising funds and awareness around antisemitism, and rallying against housing insecurity. NAOMI is excited to have Rabbi Benj involved in planning and implementing our future activities!

RUTH (RESPONDING WITH UNDERSTANDING, TRUTH AND HOPE)

RUTH (Responding with Understanding Truth and Hope in Manitowoc County) continues our advocacy with WISDOM through collaboration with JOSHUA, Green Bay.

Our work to reform the criminal justice system includes finding affordable housing for both those coming out of incarceration and those undergoing treatment, drug or mental illness, while under judicial supervision.

Our Immigration work helps newly arrived and continuing workers of our agriculture sector here in Wisconsin. A driver's license for all immigrants is a safety and an economic concern.

Connect with us



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www.joshua4justice.org



(920) 412-4725



9704 Pautz Rd.
Maribel, WI 54227



Darlene Wellner, a founding RUTH member, is a lifelong advocate of justice. With her degree in social work from UW Madison, she saw herself working as a problem solver in the community fighting racism and housing discrimination and championing equality in voting.

Much of her initial career work with the Manitowoc County public welfare department included foster care placement, neglect and abuse investigations and supervision of juveniles charged with delinquency. As an example of her strong advocacy for meeting local needs, she started a public-school lunch program in the city involving two referendums and lots of public meetings.

Darlene's values are an outgrowth of her Christian faith and membership in the Lakeshore United Methodist Church as she shared when asked why she is involved in RUTH.

Darlene is an inspiration as she continues to live the values of RUTH!

MOSES (MADISON ORGANIZING IN STRENGTH, EQUITY AND SOLIDARITY FOR CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM REFORM)



P.O. Box 7031
Madison, WI 53707

MOSES works for transformative justice in Dane County and Wisconsin. Our work goes beyond criminal legal system reform. We, as participants in the historic struggle to overcome white supremacy and systemic racism, seek to dismantle this unjust and unsustainable system.

We believe that effective reforms will ultimately allow a reallocation of public resources for the well-being of communities and families and will lead to a beloved community where all can thrive.

Our mission is to build collective power to dismantle the systems of mass incarceration and mass supervision and to eradicate the racial disparities in our community that contribute to them.

We seek justice that respects all people as part of a sacred community, honored in their individuality, and equal both under the law and in the eyes of society. We value the voices of currently and previously incarcerated individuals, their families, people of color, people living in poverty, and those burdened with physical, emotional, or mental health issues.



I am Joan Duerst, a Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa, and I have participated in MOSES from its beginning in 2010.

MOSES has been a place for me not only to learn about systemic racism but also the criminal legal system. I have not only learned about unjust systems, but I have also learned from people who have served time in the system and who have overcome the obstacles that kept them from being fair and honest in their life situations. What a blessing! MOSES learns not only by cooperating with people working for justice but also by knowing people who have worked hard and been able to be gracious, loving citizens.

Connect with us



MOSES Madison



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EXPO (EX- INCARCERATED PEOPLE ORGANIZING)

Since 2014, EXPO works to end mass incarceration, eliminate all forms of structural discrimination against formerly incarcerated people, and restore formerly incarcerated people to full participation in the life of our communities.

We believe in the human dignity of formerly and currently incarcerated people, and recognize they come from, and are part of our communities.

We believe men and women with conviction and arrest records should be viewed as valued human beings, members of families, and assets to communities. Our motto is, "You have the right to NOT remain silent."

People in our communities without direct experience with incarceration are often ill-informed of the catastrophic effects on earnings and employment, physical and mental health, housing and education, and family well-being created and perpetuated by the carceral system. Through our advocacy work in local and state government, EXPO creates space, opportunity, and support for formerly-incarcerated individuals to raise their voices about the systemic and institutional harms of prison and supervision.

In the words of one of our organizers, EXPO's work "shines a light of awareness and truth where others refuse to acknowledge."



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Madison, WI 53707



The need is great, the work extensive and heavy... There are nearly 65,000 formerly and currently incarcerated people in Wisconsin.

In addition to our local chapter work EXPO recognized there are three Statewide issues we needed to focus on to provide the greatest impact: Our "Big Three" Statewide campaigns are:

- Locked Up on the Outside: Prison without Walls
- UNLOCK THE VOTE
- SAFE Dignified Housing/Peer Support

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FREE (RECLAIMING WOMEN'S FREEDOM)

Formed in 2016, FREE is a WISDOM-affiliated organization created for and by justice impacted women and girls.

FREE seeks to empower both formerly and currently incarcerated women & girls while advocating for them in areas of dignity, housing, health and family reunification.

- We have two major areas of focus; Maternal Infant Health (MIH) and Housing. In our MIH campaign, we are currently piloting a curriculum that helps mothers reunite with their children after incarceration.
- We are also seeking to educate legislators in support of ending shackling of pregnant incarcerated women and girls, to create a WI Prison Doula Program and to address issues of dignity for incarcerated women and girls.





FREE has chapters in Dane, Chippewa & Milwaukee Counties. We hold quarterly statewide membership meetings.



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Connect with us

-  [freeWI2018](#)
-  [freewmenwi](#)
-  peggy@freemvmt.org
-  Website coming soon!

MENĪKĀNAEHKEM ((MENOMINEE RE- BUILDERS))



N8866 Cty G Rd.
Gresham, WI 54128

Our Purpose:

To rebuild and reconnect our sacred relationships with our people, plants, places and animals.

Our Mission:

Work together to enhance and promote our lifeways and build a healthier Menominee community.

Our Vision:

Rebuild our sacred connections so our lives are whole and bring opportunity to our people.

Our Major Projects:

- Environmental Justice – Rights and Protection of Nature.
- Youth -- Growing good people: Understanding self-resiliency
- Food Sovereignty – Healthy and Sustainable Food Sources
- Buffalo – Re-establishing buffalo, with the Intertribal Buffalo Council



Connect with us



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Community Rebuilders



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WISCONSIN TRANSFORMATIONAL JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

Wisconsin is one of the best places to live in the nation. We enjoy a beautiful natural environment, an excellent educational system, and renowned health care. We think of ourselves as a friendly, caring people. At the same time, we confront realities that reveal that Wisconsin is failing in its treatment of people of color. That is manifested most starkly in the realities of our criminal legal system.

In 2020 the Sentencing Project released a report showing that Wisconsin is still the state that incarcerates the highest percentage of its Black residents. Wisconsin incarcerates one out of every 36 Black adults, far above the national average of one out of 81. While only 6% of Wisconsin's population identifies as Black they make up 42% of the state prison population. Wisconsin's incarceration rate for African Americans is 12 times the rate for white adults.

Wisconsin does not just need to reform some parts of our criminal legal system; we need to transform it into something new. We need a new way to live together in our state. Our incarceration rates are directly related to poverty, education opportunities, employment opportunities, health disparities, and more. The Sentencing Project report makes very clear that the racial disparity in prison populations cannot be explained by racial patterns of criminal behavior. It is the result of systemic racism.

As we look to the major transformation we want to see, The Wisconsin Transformational Justice Campaign works on immediate steps we can take to start in that direction, such as:

- “Front End” Issues: Things that happen BEFORE a person goes to jail or prison, like the “school to prison pipeline,” policing practices, and the availability of alternatives to incarceration like the TAD program, especially for people with mental health and/or addiction issues.
- Sentencing: Wisconsin's extreme sentencing policies and practices have added to prison populations and have resulted in more elderly and seriously ill people behind bars.
- Conditions of Confinement: The use of Solitary Confinement makes prisons less safe; unsafe or inhumane conditions are harmful to both staff and residents of prisons.
- Crimeless Revocations, Probation, Parole and Extended Supervision: Wisconsin's overuse of “Supervision” leads to unnecessary incarceration and unnecessary hardship for people after they are released from prison.
- Bringing More People Home: How programs like “Earned Release,” “Compassionate Release” and wise use of commutations can be used to reduce the number of people in prison.
- Post-release Issues: When people return from incarceration, they need to be able to vote, to find decent housing, jobs and necessary health care.

ALTERNATIVES TO REVOCATION

The practice of sending people back to prison for violating a rule of their community supervision, after they have served their original sentence, accounts for more than half of all prison admissions in Wisconsin every year. Call it “crimeless revocation” or “revocation without conviction for a new crime,” this practice bloats our state prison population and forces taxpayers to pay hundreds of millions to incarcerate people who have already completed their original sentence for their crime. This is why the budget of the Department of Corrections (DOC) exceeds taxpayer funding for the entire UW System. This practice disproportionately affects people struggling with poverty, housing insecurity, mental health issues, and addiction issues. It also impacts Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities at highly disproportionate rates.

There are alternatives to this destructive practice. In 2014, the legislature passed the Short-Term Sanctions Act (2013 Act 196) which required the DOC to establish, through a public rulemaking process, graduated short-term sanctions for rule violations. The DOC has never implemented this law. No public rulemaking process was ever undertaken. Instead, the Department claims to have implemented the law “in spirit.” Its idea of a short-term sanction is 30 to 90 days of incarceration, which voids all of the considerations specified in Act 196. In some cases of rule violations, the DOC will accept or offer what it calls an “Alternative to Revocation” (ATR). However, many of those so-called alternatives are served in a setting of incarceration. What is really needed is a commitment to providing alternatives in which the person remains in the community, in contact with their families, and continuing in their employment.

Community-based Alternatives to Revocation would focus on the person’s success in the community instead of interrupting any progress they had already made. For example, a person with mental health issues might be placed in a community-based treatment program rather than sent to prison. In a policy change, Governor Evers’ administration decided to move the ATR programs that were previously in the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility to community-based settings. This is a start, but it needs to be replicated throughout the state. And it needs serious funding.

At least \$15 million that is wasted on incarcerating people for rule violations each year should be redirected to provide these individuals with effective community-based treatment programs, living-wage employment, stable housing, and high-quality educational programs. A substantial body of research demonstrates that connecting people with these kinds of opportunities will reduce the likelihood that they will return to prison and will make communities safer, stronger, and healthier.

TAD TREATMENT ALTERNATIVES AND DIVERSIONS

The TAD program is one of the most efficient, cost-effective items in the Wisconsin state budget. Study after study over more than 12 years shows that TAD-funded programs save taxpayers more than \$4 for every \$1 that the state has invested.

TAD funds allow counties to establish or expand proven programs, such as Drug Treatment Courts, Veteran's Courts, Family Courts, OWI Courts, the Safe Streets Treatment Options Program (SSTOP), and other interventions that divert people from jail or prison and into alternative programming. Besides saving money, TAD-funded programs have all proven to be more effective than incarceration for reducing recidivism. TAD-funded programs enhance public safety *and* save taxpayer dollars. TAD funding has also been used for programs to fund alternatives to revocation for people on probation, parole or extended supervision.

A \$15 million annual increase in TAD funding would result in more than 1,000 fewer people being sent to state prisons each year. It would also divert several thousand people from county jails.

In addition to a significant annual increase in TAD funding, WISDOM calls for the following:

- Change the TAD statute so that people who were once convicted of a "violent" crime (no matter how long ago) can be eligible. The statute now excludes many people who do not pose a current threat to public safety and who could benefit from treatment.
- Change the statute so that people with a mental health issue can be eligible. (Currently, only people with a diagnosed substance use disorder can participate.)
- Ensure that the expanded funding is targeted to the communities that have the highest rates of incarceration. The funding should be proportional to the racial, geographic, and economic representation in the current population of Wisconsin's jails and prisons.

Wisconsin has a proven program that saves taxpayer money, enhances public safety, and helps individuals with substance use disorder and/or mental health issues regain their health and their standing as productive community members. This essential TAD program needs to be expanded to meet its true potential.

We ask the Legislature to:

Increase the TAD budget annually by \$15 million.

RAISE THE AGE

Currently, Wisconsin is one of only three states nationwide that still automatically charges all 17-year-old youth in the adult court system. This means that 17-year-olds, many of whom are still in high school, are treated as adults and denied access to the rehabilitative programs and services available in the juvenile justice system. Other states, from Louisiana to New York, are recognizing the broad, bipartisan benefits of “raising the age” of juvenile jurisdiction and bringing 17-year-olds back to their rightful place in the juvenile court system.

Benefits of raising the age extend to both young people in the system and our broader communities. For justice-involved youth, raising the age expands rehabilitation options and leads to more opportunities for a future away from the justice system. Youth in the juvenile justice system are more likely to receive individualized rehabilitative programming, which can more properly address past trauma, mental health challenges, and other underlying conditions that may have led these individuals to the juvenile justice system in the first place. This individualized care provided in the juvenile system is crucial, as 72% of males and 100% of female youth in the Wisconsin justice system suffer from mental health challenges. Youth in the adult system, on the other hand, are more likely to see this trauma compounded in adult corrections facilities, as minors incarcerated in adult facilities are exponentially more likely to be victims of sexual abuse and 36 times more likely to commit suicide compared to those in the juvenile system.

Additionally, raising the age keeps our communities safer and helps state budgets. When youth are in the juvenile system, they are 34% less likely to recidivate, which translates to fewer crimes and safer communities. Youth in the juvenile system are also significantly more likely to obtain a high school diploma and gain steady employment, which means they will spend less of their life in the justice system and more of their time as tax-paying members of the workforce. By adding to their tax base, lowering corrections spending, and slashing crime rates, states who have raised the age continue to see stronger government budgets and safer communities.

Because we demand smart policy that provides age-appropriate, individualized programming for our state’s young people.

We ask the Legislature to:

Prioritize Raise the Age provisions in this year’s Wisconsin State Budget and appropriately fund and support counties as they bring 17-year-olds back into the juvenile court system.

EXPAND THE EARNED RELEASE PROGRAM

Since 1980, Wisconsin's prison population has expanded by more than 400%. This is an unsustainable and inhumane misconception of justice. One way to counter this trend is to invest in programs that have proven to be successful, like Wisconsin's Substance Abuse Program, better known as the Earned Release Program (ERP).

ERP is a six-month intensive, federally-approved program designed to address "criminal thinking and substance use disorders." Currently, there are thousands of people on the waiting list for this program. Many of them could earn their way home as much as three or four years earlier than would be possible without the program. Unfortunately, there is only space to accommodate a few hundred people at a time which means that even for those who do get the opportunity to participate, it often happens shortly before they would have to be released anyway. In the meantime, each year of unnecessary incarceration costs taxpayers between \$44,000 - \$55,000. It is much less expensive to pay for expanded ERP programming.

Expanding this program will give individuals necessary treatment and contribute to their positive reintegration back into society. The ERP offers cognitive-based substance abuse curriculum which addresses social skills building, problem solving, family dynamics, anger management, and employability. It not only hastens release, but it greatly increases the chances for successful re-entry.

WISDOM supports any measure that can expand the ERP so that it can serve every person who is eligible, as soon as they become eligible.

WISDOM further supports expanding the scope of ERP so it can be offered to those seeking job training as well as those in need of substance use disorder or mental health treatment.

Expansion of the Earned Release Program will result in savings to taxpayers and reduced prison populations while making communities safer and families healthier.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Solitary confinement for more than fifteen days is considered torture by the United Nations and is a violation of basic human rights. The primary task of prisons is to foster safer communities, not to be institutions of state sanctioned abuse. Despite the moral and factual evidence against solitary confinement, hundreds of Wisconsin inmates are routinely isolated in closed cells for 23 hours a day. They are virtually free of human contact, for periods of time ranging from days to decades. It is called “segregation” or “administrative confinement,” or more recently “restrictive housing.”

Calling solitary confinement by a different name does not diminish its cruelty or terrible harm it inflicts. Rick Raemisch, former Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, has said that, *“By placing a difficult (person in custody) in isolation you have not solved the problem — only delayed or more likely exacerbated it, not only for the prison, but ultimately for the public.”*

In recent years, Wisconsin has decreased the number of people in solitary confinement. The reduction, however, was very uneven – some institutions reduced it dramatically; others hardly at all. Still, as of December 31, 2022, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections held 781 human beings in solitary confinement. The Department itself identifies 92 of those people as having a “serious mental illness.” 308 of the 781 had been in solitary confinement for more than 30 days.

States like Colorado have demonstrated that ending prolonged solitary confinement can be done without compromising safety within prisons – violence in that state’s prisons actually decreased when the practice ended. Like Colorado, most advanced countries have learned to deal with difficult people in their care without resorting to torture: we can learn from them.

We ask the Legislature to:

- Immediately end the placement of mentally ill people in solitary confinement.
- Immediately begin a process that will end all use of solitary confinement for more than 15 consecutive days in Wisconsin prisons, and that the person not be sent again without due process, warnings and a mental health evaluation.

UNLOCK THE VOTE

Unlock the Vote seeks a legislative remedy to felony disenfranchisement in Wisconsin. The right to vote is fundamental to our nation's democracy and should be guaranteed to every citizen. Preventing people with previous criminal histories from voting contributes to the racial divide polarizing our country, and further marginalizes already-marginalized populations.

More than two million African Americans (almost eight percent of Black adults) are prevented from voting because of felony convictions, compared to just under two percent of all other citizens.

In 2016, the average length of stay for parole in Wisconsin was estimated at 38 months, or over 3 years, this is 1.7 times greater than the average across all states (22 months), ranking Wisconsin third nationally in terms of expected length of time people spend under parole supervision.

Wisconsin Felony Disenfranchisement

- Wisconsin ranks 20th in the U.S. for highest voter disenfranchisement.
- Wisconsin bars people who are in prison, on felony probation, on felony parole, and/or on felony extended supervision from voting.
- As of June 30, 2020, there were 64,022 people under either probation or parole supervision in the state, just slightly over the population of Oshkosh, WI. Approximately 45,367 are on felony paper unable to vote.
- One out of every nine African Americans are disenfranchised in comparison to one out of every 50 Wisconsin voters.

Other States, Red and Blue, are Enacting Reforms

- Between January 1 and September 27, 2021, at least 25 states enacted 62 laws with provisions that expand voting access. Washington is one of the most recent (2022).
- Twenty-One states currently automatically allow people with previous criminal histories to register to vote after being released from jail or prison.
- Two states (and Washington DC, and Puerto Rico) never take away people's voting rights, even while they are in prison.

Restoring Voting Rights for People with Felony Convictions Enhances Public Safety

- The Florida Parole Commission reports that "the overall three-year recidivism rate for all released inmates was 33.1%, while the recidivism rate for released prisoners who were given their civil rights back was 11%."
- The Berkeley Law Journal concluded that "states which permanently disenfranchise people with previous criminal histories experience significantly higher repeat offense rates than states that do not."

We ask the Legislature to:

Restore voting rights for people with felony convictions.



JUSTICE REINVESTMENT

In the past 40 years, as Wisconsin's prison population has skyrocketed, so has the budget. Wisconsin taxpayers now spend more than \$1.3 billion per year on "Corrections," which surpasses the amount of taxpayer money spent on the University of Wisconsin system. Justice Reinvestment is a simple concept: We need to reduce our spending on prisons, and we need to reinvest that money in programs that uplift the people, families and communities that have been devastated by mass incarceration. WISDOM has identified four crucial steps:

1. Make a commitment to building no new prisons!

There are prisons in Wisconsin that are old and need to be retired. For example: Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI -- built in 1897). Democrats, Republicans and local governments in Northeast Wisconsin all agree that GBCI needs to be closed. The Waupun Correctional Institution (built in 1854) has long outlived its reasonable lifespan. Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (built in 2000) was built badly and for a purpose that is no longer necessary. When these facilities come offline, they must not be replaced. (It should be noted that no single prison houses more than about 5% of the prison population.)

2. Reduce the prison population enough to close at least one prison.

Through increases in Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD), a reduction in Revocations, an Expanded Earned Release program, increased use of Compassionate Release, and Commutations of blatantly unjust sentences, the prison population could be reduced by far more than 5%. Common sense sentencing reform could reduce it further.

3. Save \$1 Billion over 10 Years

The larger prisons in Wisconsin (like Waupun and Green Bay) each cost about \$50 million/year to run. To build a new prison would cost in the vicinity of \$500 million. That's \$1 billion.

4. Invest the \$1 billion in programs that help people and strengthen families and communities

The \$1 billion in savings could further expand substance use disorder and mental health treatment programs, diverting even more people away from incarceration and toward health. It could be used to expand housing and job opportunities, especially for people returning from incarceration so they can be successful. It could be used for outreach to at-risk youth, for getting rid of lead paint and lead water pipes that poison young people. And, much more.

We ask the Legislature to:

Invest in people. Reverse the 40 year trend of investing billions of dollars into building and maintaining a massive prison system.

DRIVERS LICENSES FOR ALL WISCONSINITES

Restoring access to driver licenses for all Wisconsinites will strengthen our economy, improve public safety, and keep families together.

Until 2007, Wisconsin immigrant residents could obtain driver licenses. However, following the passage of the federal REAL ID Act, Wisconsin began to require people to provide proof of citizenship or immigration status to apply for a driver license or to renew an existing license, even though this is not required by the REAL ID law. An estimated 32,000 residents of our state are unable to obtain a driver license because of their immigration status, including 12,000 parents of US citizens.

Without a valid driver license, many people face barriers to meeting basic needs in day-to-day life, such as traveling to work, taking children to school, grocery shopping, going to medical appointments, and attending places of worship.

Restoring driver licenses will:

- Allow more motorists to complete driver's examinations and safety screenings.
- Provide more residents with identification, allowing people to come forward to work with law enforcement to report crimes, improving public safety for all.
- Reduce the number of uninsured drivers by at least 28,000 and result in lower insurance premiums for already-insured Wisconsin drivers, at a cost savings of \$16 million.
- Bring stability to Wisconsin's rural economy by allowing immigrant workers in our \$43 billion dairy industry to drive to work freely and safely. Analysts estimate that up to 80% of Wisconsin's dairy workers are immigrants.

We ask the Legislature to:

Keep Drivers Licenses for all Wisconsinites in the state budget

END CHILDHOOD POVERTY

A New Paradigm for Ending Child Poverty and Growing Successful Adults

We live in a country whose Constitution states that we are all created and must be treated equally but we know that is not the case. Some are born into wealth and too many are born into poverty with little chance of escape. Those born into poverty tend to stay impoverished, trapped in an economic system that supports inherent inequality. Wealth buys not only power but the means to provide a healthy and nurturing environment for the next generation.

The US has a higher poverty rate than 35 of the top 39 wealthy countries (OECD), and poverty itself is a cause of unequal outcomes in health. We know this because hundreds of research studies have linked the toxic stress of child poverty to a multitude of undesirable adult outcomes including many diseases and a lifespan shortened by as much as 20 years (CDC). It is in our country's best interest to support families to enable all children to have equal opportunities for success.

A majority (70%) of Wisconsin voters support direct payments through the Build Back Better Plan (Data For Progress).

Governor Evers has submitted his 2023-25 Biennial Budget. We call for \$300 million to continue Child Care Counts. Child Care Counts remains essential for Wisconsin early childhood care and education programs, and, by extension, is critical for families, early childhood educators, businesses, and the economy.

We also call for \$8.79 million for children's mental health, \$10 million for the expansion of the Family Foundations Home Visiting Program, and extending Medicaid coverage in the postpartum period so individuals can maintain coverage for 12 months after birth of an infant.

We ask the Legislature to include:

- \$300 million to continue Child Care Counts
- \$8.79 million for children's mental health
- \$10 million for the expansion of the Family Foundations Home Visiting Program

BADGERCARE EXPANSION

Wisconsin is one of only 10 states that have not accepted the expanded federal Medicaid funds that have been offered since 2014. That needs to change. Wisconsin needs to accept the federal money offered so we can expand Badgercare.

In recent years, the state has used Wisconsin taxpayer money to pay for some of the gaps in Badgercare that would have been filled with the federal money. Still, in 2020 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation estimated that 120,000 additional Wisconsinites would have health coverage, and the state's uninsured rate would drop by 16%, if we had accepted the federal money. Governor Evers believes that at least 89,000 people would become insured if the state budget were to include accepting the money to expand Badgercare. By refusing to follow the path chosen by 38 states and the District of Columbia, Wisconsin would forfeit approximately \$1.6 billion over the next two years that could be used to improve the health of our people.

Badgercare expansion need not be a partisan issue. States controlled by both major political parties have accepted the federal money and have expanded their versions of Badgercare. In Wisconsin, polls have shown that about 70% of all residents support Badgercare expansion.

The savings from accepting the Medicaid expansion would make it possible for the state to fund benefits that would help working people to stay healthier and reduce costly medical treatment. Wisconsin could invest more in public health and community health workers. Governor Evers has also envisioned investment in “nonmedical services such as housing referrals, nutritional mentoring, stress management, and other services positively impact a person’s economic and social condition.”

Our first responsibility as a state is to look after the safety, health and well-being of our people, especially those who are the most vulnerable. We should take all reasonable measures to ensure that Wisconsinites are not driven into bankruptcy by a medical emergency, and that no one avoids medical attention because they fear being driven deeper into poverty.

The state of Wisconsin needs to stop playing political games with its people’s health. We must join the rest of the country in accepting the federal money to expand Badgercare, to improve health and to save Wisconsin taxpayer money.

We ask the Legislature to:

Accept the federal money to expand BadgerCare.



TRANSITIONAL JOBS

Transitional Jobs are short term subsidized jobs that are effective in getting marginalized jobseekers into work. Just under two-thirds of participants go on to secure long-term unsubsidized employment and establish a firm foothold in the formal economy. Transitional Jobs typically last only six months and pay minimum wage but they are an important on-ramp to better opportunities for many marginalized groups including the long-term unemployed, the previously incarcerated and those isolated from economic opportunity.

We're asking for \$5 million of GPR (General Purpose Revenue) for Transitional Jobs. All the Transitional Jobs funding currently comes from federal TANF (Temporary Aid For Needy Families) funds. TANF requirements render any persons 24 and older without children ineligible for any TANF programming. Formerly incarcerated persons who have been in prison for extended periods of time and come out of prison without children are therefore ineligible for Transitional Jobs. Getting GPR funding for Transitional Jobs would make them eligible for Transitional Jobs. WISDOM strongly supports these changes and has been working towards the goal of statewide availability of Transitional Jobs for over a decade.

Over the years many Democrats and Republicans have been supportive of Transitional Jobs because they help to create employment and expand the workforce. In the ten years that the Department of Children and Families has been running Transitional Jobs programs in Wisconsin more than 8,500 participants have found work through these programs increasing their economic wellbeing and the economic health of the wider community. The employers who participate in the program, many of whom are small businesses, are very positive about it.

We ask the Legislature to include:

\$5 million for transitional jobs.

CHILDHOOD LEAD POSIONING

It is a widely accepted scientific reality that lead poisoning can cause permanent cognitive damage, behavioral problems, higher school suspension rates, health issues, and a highly increased likelihood of being imprisoned for violent crimes. Wisconsin state statute defines lead poisoning as a level of lead in the blood of 5 or more micrograms per deciliter of blood. Since 2021 the CDC has used 3.5 as the highest permissible microgram per deciliter acceptable, but no level of lead in the blood is “safe”! How well or poorly children are doing in the third grade and their behavior problems is used by the DOJ as a predictor for the number of beds that prisons will need in the future. This is also a racial issue as Black children are twice as likely to suffer lead poisoning than white children. The Department of Health Services (DHS) stated in their 2014 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin that if lead poisoning in children were completely eliminated, the state would save \$7 billion in costs for medical treatment, special education, and crime and juvenile delinquency. One can only imagine the amounts for 2023. This report also stated there would be an estimated \$21 billion in new earnings because of increased high school graduation rates and increased lifetime ability to earn.

Lead poisoning is a statewide tragedy. Between 1996 and 2016, lead poisoned children were found in every Wisconsin county according to the DHS 2016 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin, p.12. We have a moral responsibility to protect our children. There is no sadder thing than a child whose potential is lost needlessly.

As Harriet A. Washington states in *A Terrible Thing to Waste*, “Lead poisoning has cost our country a staggering \$50 billion. But it also has cost our nation something far more precious: 23 million lost IQ points every year. The loss of intelligence and the malignant flowering of behavioral problems destroy lives and human potential as effectively as cancer and lung disease but with far fewer alarms raised. Lead poisoning is 100% preventable if we have the will to do so!

We ask the Legislature to:

Allocate \$200 million for the replacement of lead service lines across the state.

"SELECTED" AFFILIATE ISSUES

Examples of some of the issues WISDOM affiliates are addressing:

RIC: TURN UP THE VOTE

Racine Interfaith Coalition's Turn-Up the Vote effort centers on helping everyone to vote. By going door to door in low turn-out neighborhoods or sitting at tables in public arenas, stores, and at events etc., we encourage and assist them to register. We provide information about where and when they can vote, what offices are on the ballot, and what each office is responsible for and any other information they may need. Then we offer them and anyone they may know a ride to the polls on election day. We have been doing this for over 12 years.

MICAH: connecting central city residents with suburban jobs and resources and addressing racial disparities in access to transportation.

MICAH's Transportation Task Force (a part of MICAH'S Jobs and Economics Committee) supports:

- Investing public monies in transit rather than expanding highways.
- Reversing the current funding which gives transit only 20% of the state transportation budget.
- FIXatSix, an alternative proposal to adding additional lanes to the proposed updating of I-94 west between the Marquette Interchange and the Zoo Interchange.
- Transforming Hwy 175 north of I-94 into a boulevard, reconnecting the adjacent neighborhoods and creating the opportunity for economic development.
- Funding for FlexRide and other proposals to provide public-private financing for connecting people to family supporting jobs in the suburbs surrounding Milwaukee.
- Creating a vibrant multi-modal and equitable transportation system for Southeast Wisconsin beginning with funding for Bus Rapid Transit routes both east and west and north and south.
- Allowing the sales tax to rise 1% to avoid drastic cuts for public transit in Milwaukee County.

As a member of the state-wide Coalition for More Responsible Transportation the Task Force has participated in press conferences, information stations at WisDOT events, Juneteenth Day, public witness events, door-to-door visits in the blocks adjoining the proposed expansion and placement of FIXatSIX yard signs throughout Milwaukee.

"SELECTED" AFFILIATE ISSUES

Examples of some of the issues WISDOM affiliates are addressing:

SOPHIA: Housing Justice Task Force fights for Affordable Housing in Waukesha

For more than a decade, SOPHIA has recognized the need to expand affordable housing options in Waukesha County.

The vision of the Housing Justice Task Force is to create a new narrative about affordable housing reflecting the root causes of homelessness and the value of ensuring housing opportunities for people of all income levels in Waukesha County. Goals include:

- Develop strategic partnerships and collaboration with housing affordability and opportunity stakeholders.
- Present a series of housing forums about thriving communities that offer a wide range of housing, economic, social, and civic opportunities.
- Engage people that have been impacted by housing insecurities as leaders for reform.
- Work locally to mitigate barriers to landlords' acceptance of tenants with Housing Choice Vouchers.

MOSES tackles issues affecting children at home and in school

Led by focus groups of its Racial Justice for All Children Task Force, MOSES is addressing these issues:

- (Housing Focus Group) Eviction records retention reduction: Wisconsin state law mandates a 20-year retention period for eviction records, which places a substantial and long-term burden on families who need stable, affordable housing. Renters are evicted for many reasons, including the inability to meet financial deadlines. MOSES opposes lengthy eviction record retention for all but the most serious felony convictions of the lessee and supports a significant reduction for all lesser reasons.
- (Education Advocacy Focus Group) Dyslexia Evaluation and Treatment: 5-10% of the population is currently diagnosed with dyslexia, but the correct number is believed to be closer to 15-20%. Dyslexia is a neurological condition, often hereditary, that goes largely undiagnosed for many Wisconsin students because there is currently no requirement for schools to screen children for dyslexia. Research suggests that the best way to teach children to read is with Science of Reading (SoR) rather than the widely used whole language and balanced literacy curricula. MOSES advocates for all youth to be screened for dyslexia in grades K-2, and supports training in research-based SoR practices for all classroom teachers.

"SELECTED" AFFILIATE ISSUES

Examples of some of the issues WISDOM affiliates are addressing:

ESTHER is taking part of a statewide effort to federally recognize the Brothertown Nation.

The Brothertown Indians are an amalgamated group composed of the remnants of several Algonquin speaking tribes that banded together under the leadership of a small group of native ministers. As a result of The Great Awakening, a religious movement in the 1740's, many Indian people in southern New England converted to Christianity, including members of the Mohegan, Pequot, Narragansett, Montuck, Tunix, Wangunk and Niantic tribes, the parent tribes of the present day Brothertown Indian Nation.

The never-ending pressure for Indian land forced the Brothertown Indians to move six times, culminating in a move to Wisconsin in 1832 with their relatives, the Oneida and the Stockbridge Indians. No sooner had the United States formally recognized the Brothertown Indians and set aside 23,040 acres in what is now Calumet County as a reservation for them, the U.S. Government sought to move them to Kansas. In an effort to prevent removal to Kansas, Brothertown leadership requested a Congressional Act to give them individual ownership of their land and U.S. Citizenship. The United States granted their request but also terminated their status as a federally recognized Indian tribe. The Brothertown Indian Nation has been formally seeking to reverse termination and to be restored since 1980.

JONAH is addressing the mental health crisis in our country.

There is no denying mental health is a current crisis. According to MHA National's 2020 findings, 21% of adults are experiencing a mental illness, 60% of youth struggling with depression do not receive treatment, and in the US there is 350 individuals for everyone provider. It is clear there is a dire shortage of mental health care providers. Shortages are felt most acutely in rural communities and among people of color. Substance misuse is a mental health issue. Supporting people in recovery gets them back in the workforce more quickly, and taking care of those unable to take care of themselves is our duty as humans.

JONAH is asking to rebuild the mental health workforce by increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for providers, expedite professional licensing, fund school mental health services, require insurers to cover telehealth for mental health care, fully fund the Community Support Program (CSP), decriminalize mental illness, expand Mental Health Courts, strengthen and integrate crisis services, and reform emergency detention.

They also ask that funds be allocated toward peer support services. Peer support specialists can help address some of the gaps, often prevent further crisis, support overloaded county programs, and can employ people in recovery.

RIGHTS OF NATURE

Why do we care about the natural world? What gives it value and worth? Too often, politicians and courts, businesses and landowners, measure the worth of a body of water, or a forest or an animal species by its economic impact. How much could it be sold for? How much income does it generate? Who owns it and has the right to do with it as they wish?

The Rights of Nature movement has a different answer. We believe that other living things, including plants, animals, rivers and lakes, have their own intrinsic value. That is, their worth is not derived from us.

The Rights of Nature movement believes that human beings are meant to live in community with the other living things of this earth. Rather than approach the rest of creation with an attitude of domination, exploitation and ownership, we and all other creatures are happiest - most able to thrive - when we approach the natural world with respect.

The Rights of Nature movement is heavily influenced by Native American spirituality. Native American people lived on this continent for tens of thousands of years without destroying it. In less than 550 years since the European invasion, we have damaged our environment in ways that have created a true existential crisis. It is time that we all took a moment to consider that our Native American siblings understood something that the Europeans did not.


In 2020 the Menominee Indian Tribe passed a resolution on “The Rights of the Menominee River” that reads, in part:


The Menominee River possesses inherent and legal rights including the right to naturally exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve; the right to restoration, recovery, and preservation; the right to abundant, pure, clean, unpolluted water; the right to natural groundwater recharge and surface water recharge; the right to a healthy natural environment and natural biodiversity; the right to natural water flow; the right to carry out its natural ecosystem functions; and the right to be free of activities or practices, as well as obstructions, that interfere with or infringe upon these rights...

The WISDOM Rights of Nature group intends to pursue county resolutions in various parts of the state that will echo the Menominee resolution. The idea is to stand in solidarity with our Menominee brothers and sisters, and to also recognize the rights of a river or lake in the local county.


The Rights of Nature movement is practical, legal and deeply spiritual. Many have misunderstood the Biblical word that humans were to have “dominion... over all the earth...” to mean unfettered ownership rather than responsibility. Rights of Nature calls us all to re-examine the proper relationship between us and the rest of God’s creation.

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