



MICAH CUSH RIC SOPHIA JOSHUA ESTHER JOB JONAH NAOMI RUTH MOSES
Milwaukee Kenosha Racine Waukesha Green Bay Fox Valley Beloit Eau Claire Wausau Manitowoc Madison

Linking faith communities across Wisconsin to work for Justice

Phone: 414-831-2070 **Email:** wisdomforjustice@gmail.com
Address: 2821 Vel Phillips Ave, # 217, Milwaukee, WI 53212

Treatment Alternatives and Diversions briefing

Our state prisons are overcrowded, understaffed and, in some cases, very near the end of their physical viability. New OWI laws, the heroin epidemic, and the continuing crisis of methamphetamine addiction are threatening to further increase the population of our prisons. On the other hand, Wisconsin has many proven, evidence-based, cost-effective alternatives to incarceration. Drug Treatment Courts, Veteran's Courts, Family Courts, OWI Courts, the Safe Streets Treatment Options Program (SSTOP), and other interventions have all proven to be more effective than incarceration for reducing recidivism.

Legislatively-mandated evaluations of the programs funded by the Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD) fund show that they save taxpayers almost \$2 for every \$1 the state has invested. The UW LaFollette School of Public Affairs has confirmed these savings, and has said that there is tremendous room for expansion of the program. TAD funding grants money to counties to implement the treatment alternatives and diversions programs they believe are most needed and will be most effective for their communities.

Actions to be taken:

1. The 2019-21 state budget should include a \$35 million increase in funding for TAD programs.
2. \$25 million should be set aside for increasing pre-trial alternatives to incarceration. The money should be allocated to counties in direct proportion to the number of people from each county who are currently incarcerated.
3. A small percentage of TAD funding is currently used for alternatives to revocation. An increase of \$10 million should be added to this, to provide community-based (not COD-based) alternatives. This should also be provided in proportion to the number of revocations and revocation holds in each county in recent years.
4. The budget should propose fixes to TAD legislation which are recommended by many local and state officials: a) to modify the statute so the money can be used for people suffering from mental illness, even if they have no substance abuse problem, and; b) to modify the statute so that people who were once convicted of a "violent" offense can be eligible for the program on a subsequent "non-violent" offense.
5. The TAD increase should have a significant percentage set aside for thorough and professional evaluation of the overall program and the multiple local programs it funds. Originally, TAD was rigorously evaluated by the UW Population Health Institute. In recent years, evaluation has been assigned to the Department of Justice, but the DOJ was given very limited resources for evaluation.

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