

MOSES



Madison Organizing in Strength, Equality, and Solidarity
for Criminal Justice Reform

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Criminal Justice and the State Budget

The Good and the Bad

By Gil Halsted

Despite the fact that the partisan balance on the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee (JFC) is weighted heavily in favor of Republicans (GOP-11 to Dem-4), the committee did actually agree on a few important budget items. First, there will be an increase in pay for correctional officers (COs), which both parties hope will encourage more people to apply, which in turn will reduce the need to require COs to work forced overtime. That should result in a healthier and more committed cadre of officers who will be more disposed to treat prisoners fairly. We can hope. But as reported in the *Journal Sentinel*, frontline COs don't think the raise will have good results. Matthew Fochs, who works at Red Granite, said "... it would take two years to materialize, and existing wages are crappy."

The other good news is only moderately good. The GOP-controlled panel approved a moderate increase in two reentry programs: OARS (Opening Avenues to Reentry Success) and Windows to Work. The four Democrats on the panel had pushed for a more substan-

tial increase, citing the positive impact the two programs have had on reducing recidivism.

There is even some good news about the bad news: the plan to spend \$6 million on building and staffing barracks at six different prisons, to accommodate the rising prison population and alleviate overcrowding, has been put on hold for the time being. WISDOM and its af-

filicates have spoken out strongly against this plan, warning that building more bed space for prisons simply encourages the rest of the criminal justice system to fill those beds, instead of seeking ways to stop locking up more people. In fact, Democrats on the panel tried to

convince their colleagues to simply shift those \$6 million into the Treatment Alternatives & Diversions (TAD) program. That failed, as have most of the Democrats' efforts, on a straight 11-4 partisan vote.

The partisan dynamic on the JFC is depressing to see in action. Republicans are full of the hubris that their dominance in numbers and commitment to lock-step unanimity affords them. They are fond of repeatedly pointing



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Executive Committee

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 Alison Mix, Vice President
 Rachel Morgan, Designated
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 Ann Lacy, Treasurer
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 Jeanie Verschay
 Member Engagement
 Karen Julesberg
 Recruitment
 Frank Davis

MOSES Task Forces

MOSES Justice System Reform
 Initiative
 Paul Saeman
 Jeanie Verschay

MOSES's Justice System Reform Initiative to "Keep Pushing"

by Alison Mix

Our issues are coming to the fore in interesting ways," noted Paul Saeman at the monthly meeting of MOSES's Justice System Reform Initiative (JSRI) May 9. "The jail is not just the jail. When we started in 2014 with the original jail study, the diversions discussion wasn't really going on. So we need to keep pushing for the things we have been interested in for the last five years."

Mental health services

Paul Saeman reported that he and Jeanie Verschay had been invited to participate in a number of focus groups conducted by PCG, the consulting group hired by the Dane County Board at a cost of \$140,000, to determine the current situation with regard to mental health services in the county, including evaluation of a crisis restoration center.

The group that Saeman attended looked at how mental health is managed, the lack of coordination, problems in rural areas, and the lack of data. The discussion, involving many stakeholders such as Briarpatch Youth Services and the Office on Aging, went into a lot of detail and substance about the issues, with a strong emphasis on the intersection with the criminal justice system. "I was very impressed," said Saeman, who was able to give the consultants MOSES's Desired Future Conditions paper and another of our papers on a crisis restoration center.

PCG will make an interim report, including recommendations, with a final report due in October.

Jail remodel

By the time of the JSRI meeting, two Dane County committees had already chosen the south tower option over three alternatives that were more expensive and would likely have required building on a site outside of downtown. The \$148 million budget amount won't be approved until the new Dane County budget cycle in the fall. While there was general frustration with having to move ahead with a new jail before the crisis restoration center issue had been worked through, a new jail is need-

ed, by nearly all accounts, for safety reasons. "Diversion efforts," said Saeman, take a long time. "They're not easy to do. There isn't a quick fix that is going to dramatically reduce the numbers."

Mary Anglim reminded us that mental health services are not just about people who get in trouble with the law, but also "the whole state of people who are less than privileged, people who miss too many days of school

because they can't get out of bed in the morning due to depression, or who can't get the mental health care they need because they don't have the insurance for it, or have to wait six months to get in."

DOC (state Department of Corrections) holds in Dane County Jail

Barbie Jackson shared what the Diversions Focus Area has been doing. Last year, the group looked at Resolution 556 and selected two recommendations to follow up on: the Community Restorative Court and 'Length of Stay' concerns, i.e. trying to get some baseline data on the reasons for probation and

parole holds, duration of the holds, race of the persons held, etc. "We raised the matter at a CJC meeting and learned that this is one of the hardest things — even though it does not involve cost, because it involves getting information from the DOC," Jackson said. It is the county resolving to tell the state to do something."

The whole purpose of getting the data is to have a baseline of reality for measuring progress. However, on this matter, MOSES needs to be talking to the DOC. Now that Evers-appointed Secretary Kevin Carr is in place, perhaps some progress will be possible. As Jeanie Verschay said, "Carr seems to have a genuine commitment to supporting changes."

"All the county jails are full," said Paul Saeman, "because of DOC revocation holds. Carr needs a proposal on how to reduce the holds. That and mental health are the two big issues." ■

Formerly known as the Jail Task Force, JSRI is MOSES's single task force. It is made up of three focus areas:

- Jail Issues (explored by Paul Saeman and Jeanie Verschay in monthly meetings with the Dane County jail staff);
- Diversions (an active group of nine members that meets monthly);
- Crisis Restoration Center (currently dormant while awaiting construction of a private mental health facility in Middleton and an understanding of the contribution it could make).

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out the ideological divide they say separates the two parties. Their bottom line is ‘no new taxes,’ they say, while the Democrats just want to ‘tax and spend’ more. This allows them to avoid considering the long-term impacts of their policies. Democrats on the committee repeatedly point out that the Walker administration’s repeal of former Gov. Jim Doyle’s Act 28, which allowed for early release of prisoners who completed their re-

hab programs, has led to the current increase in the prison population. But those efforts fall on deaf ears. Republicans are not interested in engaging in any kind of humility for past mistakes.

The best hope for positive change on the legislative front now comes from the efforts of state Rep. Evan Goyke, D-Milwaukee, who is doing his best to pursue bipartisan efforts for progressive prison reform. ■

Racine Alderman and Social Worker John Tate II Tapped to Chair State Parole Commission

by S. Frances Hoffman

On May 21, 2019, MOSES members reacted with great excitement and enthusiasm to the long-awaited announcement by Gov. Tony Evers that he had appointed a new chair of the Parole Commission. His choice of Racine alderman John Tate II met with immediate approval. Evers said, “I know that John Tate II will be a strong advocate for the change we need to ensure our criminal justice system treats everyone fairly and focuses on rehabilitation.”



John Tate II

As a social worker, Tate said he believes he has the necessary insight to make the correct decisions as to which individuals receive parole. “I’m trying to find ways to get people back to their communities (...) and find the inefficiencies within DOC that leave these folks on the sidelines,” he said. Individuals who have served, in some cases, several decades in prison should be able to show that they are not the same persons they were when the crime was committed.

All of these statements were welcome words to the members of WISDOM’s Old Law Parole and Compassionate Release task force (conference call), who have repeatedly echoed these sentiments in their ongoing advocacy. In his message to this task force, David Liners, state coordinator of WISDOM, offered this appraisal: “I believe this is very good news. Our Racine Interfaith Coalition (RIC) members and EXPO members know Mr. Tate quite well. He is a social worker by profession, has some experience

“I know that John Tate II will be a strong advocate for the change we need to ensure our criminal justice system treats everyone fairly and focuses on rehabilitation.”

~ Gov. Tony Evers

of the corrections system, and seems to share our values.”

Tate will start work on June 3, though his appointment is subject to confirmation by the state Senate.

In his communication to the Old Law Parole task force, WISDOM state coordinator David Liners wrote about next steps. “We are trying to set up a chance for at least some of us to meet with Chairperson-designee Tate as soon as possible—ideally even before June 3. We’ll want to give him the many profiles that Alison [Mix] and others have been putting together, and we’ll want to establish a permanent link with him.” Liners concluded his message by repeating what he had said to Mr. Tate: “I told Mr. Tate that he is, literally the answer to a lot of people’s prayers.” He assured the task force, “I really do trust that he is coming into this job with the right intentions and the right values — we need to figure out how to make sure he has support for that.”

MOSES members and members of the First Unitarian Society will have the opportunity to participate in the final “Ready for Release Party” on Saturday, June 1, 2019, as they complete the spreadsheet of all those Old Law Parole individuals who have sent in their profiles to WISDOM and Alison Mix since the beginning of the year. This spreadsheet, which is just the tip of the iceberg of the nearly 3,000 “Old Law” parole-eligible prisoners, will be presented to Chairperson Tate at a press event once Tate officially begins his work. ■

Why I Am a Sustaining Member of MOSES

by Sister Frances Hoffman

Of my 31 years teaching in elementary schools, I spent ten memorable years in the Milwaukee Central City Catholic school system at two schools with majority black student populations. For me, who had previously taught only in suburban schools, every day was a new learning experience! With the help of my small living group of Racine Dominicans, I gained cultural understanding and drew energy for this inner city educational ministry.

My Racine Dominican community has had a long history of action for justice. Through the years, due to the impetus and example of many strong, prophetic women, workshops on poverty and racism became a part of my ongoing community education. When family health concerns necessitated my moving back to the Madison area, I brought with me my relationships with black families and friends. It was after the deaths of both my mother and my sister that I became a part of MOSES. For me, it was a way to probe deeper and to recognize the effects of racism within myself and in society around me.

I was able to communicate to my executive team the policy-changing influence that I saw MOSES exerting, even as the community took up the theme of racism for continuing study and action. As a result, the Racine Dominican Mission Fund has afforded grants to MOSES

over the past four years. Since my retirement, I have participated more fully in meetings of the MOSES JSRI (Justice System Reform Initiative) to become knowledgeable and to contribute to MOSES's positions on the county jail; treatment alternatives and diversion (TAD); and restorative justice circles. I am also part of the WISDOM task force on Old Law Prisoners and Compassionate Release.

As a member of the Fundraising team, I am very aware of how critical monetary support is to the continuing effectiveness of our organization. On the team we are always looking for new ideas for engaging people in support of MOSES. Along with essential grant support, of equal necessity are sustaining, monthly contributions to cover the normal daily expenses of maintaining an organization.

As I submit my annual budget to my religious community, I include the amount of a monthly automatic electronic funds transfer (EFT) to WISDOM-MOSES that identifies me as a sustaining member. I place a priority on this because I believe in the mission of MOSES and I know that my Racine Dominican Community shares that commitment. It is my hope that more of our MOSES members will join me and other sustainers in pledging a monthly amount to keep MOSES strong and thriving as we focus on racial equity and fight for reform of the criminal justice system.

My former students of color now have children and grandchildren of their own. Despite the pride we their teachers instilled in them, they and their offspring face the same societal challenges, often displayed even more overtly. With MOSES members, united in faith and courage, standing up and stepping out for justice, I can advocate for the future of black lives. ■



Sister Frances Hoffman

MOSES Meetings

MOSES Religious Leaders Caucus (RLC)

- RLC Monthly Meeting: June 12 and July 10
8:30-10:00 am, St. Luke's Episcopal Church (Jericho Room)

MOSES Task Force: Justice System Reform Initiative (MJSRI)

- MJSRI Monthly Meeting: June 13 and July 11
6:30-8:30 pm at Madison Police Station South District, 825 Hughes Place

MOSES Leadership Board

- Thursday, July 18th

Next MOSES monthly meetings

- Sunday, July 14 at 2:30 pm
 - Sunday, August 4 at 2:30 pm
- Click on the calendar link for details and directions.

Statewide Task Forces

WISDOM conference calls (605) 468-8012

- Old Law: June 8 and July 13 at 8:30 am
(code 423950)
- Solitary Confinement: June 11, and July 9 at 4:00 pm
(code 423950)
- Prison Prevention: June 11, and July 9 at 5:00 pm
(code 423950)
- Post-Release: June 27 and July 25 at 7:30 pm
(code 423951)

Talib Akbar Receives 2019 Change-Maker Award

by Rachel Morgan

MOSES is pleased to announce that Talib Akbar is the recipient of a Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) 2019 Change-Maker Award! Nominated by MOSES-WISDOM of Madison, Akbar will be awarded the Linda Sundberg Civil Rights Defender Award for his tireless work on ending solitary confinement.

Akbar began his efforts by designing and building, with the help and support of others, a life-size replica of a solitary confinement cell, complete with a recorded soundtrack from a Wisconsin prison. The cell has been displayed at churches, colleges, and other organizations. Akbar then went on to co-author and direct a play titled "Like an Animal in a Cage," a chilling account of the experiences of people who have endured solitary confinement. His most recent creation is a solitary confinement truck, a moving display of the inhumanity of solitary confinement, which has traveled to many Wisconsin locations.

All of this work has been done to educate the community about the torture experienced by people in solitary confinement in Wisconsin jails and prisons. Talib's passion for eliminating the use of solitary confinement will not end until this horrifying practice stops for our brothers and sisters who are still suffering.



Talib Akbar



Community Shares of
WISCONSIN



Solitary Confinement Truck



Audience watches "Like an Animal in a Cage"

Because no one works alone, MOSES would also like to acknowledge the support Akbar has received from Rev. Jerry Hancock and Rev. Kate Edwards. Says Hancock: "Talib and his great friend Rev. Kate Edwards have worked tirelessly to actually show people the evil of solitary confinement, because before you can change evil, you have to see evil."

Community Shares of Wisconsin invites you to attend the annual Community Change-Maker Awards event on Thursday, Sept. 19, 2019, in Union South. Mark your calendars! ■

Transformation Celebration 2019

MOSES Fundraising Gala
December 14, 2019

Save the Date!

A Reflection on the WISDOM In-Person Gathering

by Sister Joan Duerst

Welcome! We want you to know that you are welcome here in the home of the Menominee! After that energetic greeting, eight MOSES members joined 30 people from 10 other WISDOM affiliates for a recent all-day session at Menominee College in Keshena, Wis. One purpose of the event, as stated by WISDOM state coordinator David Liners, was to “talk about how to strengthen the participation of our religious leaders ... [and] to have a conversation with our brothers and sisters of the Menikanaehkem (Community Rebuilders) of the Menominee Reservation. The discussion will be about ... how we can build a long-term, mutually respectful, and beneficial relationship between Menikanaehkem and WISDOM.”

Menominee Tribe member Tony Brown and an elder, Napoose, welcomed the Great Spirit into the circle of WISDOM leaders through sacred ritual, song, and prayer. Then leaders from five religious leader caucuses gave reports and ideas for future participation of the various faith traditions of WISDOM. As chair of the MOSES Religious Leader Caucus, my own report summed it up this way:

“As people come to pray together, share concerns for words of hatred, for gun violence, for racism, for poverty, we grow in faith. We realize that we are called to be children of the Creator and to co-create justice for all. We see that it is not enough to be just to one another on a one-to-one basis — respecting spouses, children, and elders; paying a fair wage; not taking what belongs to another. We begin to see that systems that we have been born into often oppress and exploit others and the Earth. If we are to be co-creators, we cannot simply keep silent. We cannot be complicit while others are harmed by discrimination due to gender, gender orientation, race, religion or economic means.

Our faith leaders are teachers, who lead us to grow in our understanding of justice and how God and God’s spirit calls us to create just and loving systems.

Our faith leaders are encouragers, who strengthen the justice and peace committees of our congregations.

Our faith leaders bring people of various denominations and faiths together to work for justice.”

The circle was reminded of what Rev. Joseph Ellwanger wrote five years ago in his book *Strength for the Strug-*

gle. He wrote of the influence of the Black clergy during the civil rights era, saying: “If the issues today seem to be more complex and more subtle, that means that we need to summon more research skills to analyze them and more creativity to figure out solutions. And if people think the system will work out the ‘kinks’ of injustice and thwart the persistent attempts to sabotage the progress that has been achieved, they have not studied history. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, ‘Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of people willing to be co-workers with God, and without this work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.’” (p. 271)

In the afternoon, Tony Brown and Napoose shared spirituality from the Menominee tradition. He explained how various colors help us see and reverence all the aspects of creation.

Especially revered is the coming of the spirit into the child when it is still in its mother’s womb: “There is great love for the children. Everything we do is for the children and their children, into future generations.”

As Brown and Napoose spoke, told stories, and sang, it felt to me as if faith was alive!

Can faith and a passion for justice bring the work of WISDOM and the Menominee closer together? In 2017, the Menominee shared their concern for protecting the waters of the Menominee River and the land of the Menominee people from the intrusion of the Back Forty Mine. WISDOM brought more Wisconsin voices to the protest. Are we being called to work together again?

One thing we were asked to do was to help all the people of the U.S. remember that the Menominee and other Indigenous were on this continent first. We also must struggle to overcome the injustices perpetrated against them by so-called people of religion, who brought devastation to their lands and people in the name of colonization, manifest destiny, and a Doctrine of Discovery. How can people of faith and spirituality be people of religion, without being aware of and acknowledging the oppression and hardship brought to the First People, specifically, as Tony Brown reminded us, “in the name of Christianity”?

This deeply moving gathering in the home of the Menominee offered much food for thought indeed. ■

Race Relations Expert Addresses Mass Incarceration

by Rachel Morgan

On April 17, MOSES held a “Lunch & Learn” fundraising event that featured Reggie Jackson, an award-winning journalist, graduate of Concordia University graduate, and Head Griot (docent) of America’s Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee. Approximately 79 people attended, and the luncheon raised close to \$1,300.

Jackson, who has served as a race relations expert for CNN, Wisconsin Public Radio, National Public Radio, Reuters News Service, and the BBC, titled his talk “The 2.2 Million: The History and Human Cost of Mass Incarceration.” His passion for history and for ending mass incarceration was eye-opening, even to those of us who have been working for criminal justice reform for years.



Jackson also affirmed MOSES’s work on issues that could greatly reduce incarceration. We consistently send more people to prison for revocations each year, he said, than we do for new sentences. “Ending revocations for technical violations of supervised release would play a bigger part in reducing over-incarceration in Wisconsin than any other single factor,” he said. “In addition, we have nearly 3,000 people incarcerated under the ‘old law’ who would be free if we still used the Parole Commission properly.” (*Editor’s note: see p. 3*)

The luncheon ended with a call to action: call or write Governor Evers’s office demanding that he appoint a chair of the Parole Commission immediately to answer the plight of people in prison under “old law,” who should have been released years ago.

The reasonable cost of the luncheon was made possible through donations by James Morgan’s Renewal After Prison (RAP) project and Emmanuel Scarborough, who paid for Jackson’s travel. The NAACP also sponsored this



For example, statistics about the racial disparities in the prison population are generally presented by comparing Wisconsin’s population of African Americans (6 percent) to the percentage of Black males who make up our prison population (48 percent). However, Jackson thought about these numbers and concluded that the 6 percent includes babies, children, and women who should not legitimately be factored into this overwhelming racial disparity. So he researched the population of Black males in Wisconsin ages 18 to 55 — the age range of the incarcerated Black male population — and found that they represent only 2 percent of the total population, making the disparity even more glaring.



event and advertised it through their network.

A big thank you to everyone who made this a truly educational experience! ■

Book Review – The Sun Does Shine

By Anthony Ray Hinton (with Laura Love Hardin)

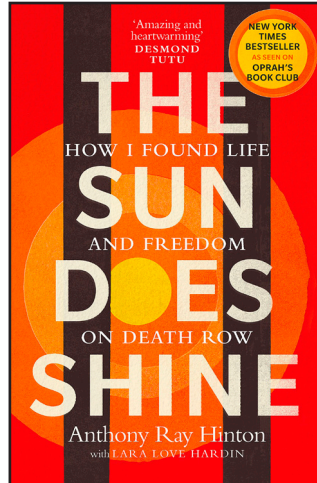
reviewed by Pamela Gates

This powerful book, recommended by such luminaries as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Oprah Winfrey, and Bryan Stephenson, tells the story of Anthony Ray Hinton, a young black man arrested for, charged with, and convicted of crimes he didn't commit. Hinton spent almost 30 years on Alabama's death row, finally winning release through the tenacious efforts of Bryan Stephenson, an African American lawyer, author, and public speaker who is also the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative.

Hinton grew up poor in rural Alabama, worked as a contractual laborer and was in his late 20s, still living with his mother at the time of his arrest. He had never been accused of a violent act before, and he had a strong alibi. Yet because he had no money for a lawyer, and because his public defender made little effort to defend him, he ended up on death row. He was even told that because he was black, he needn't expect any other judgement besides "guilty." A local white businessman had been robbed and murdered; the system needed a conviction. It was going to get one.

The most amazing aspect of this story is hinted at in the title and clarified in the subtitle: "How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row." As would be expected, Hinton arrived on death row in despair, and spent his first several years expressing that. But eventually he decided to make the best of the situation and became a support to his companions on the row, even the guards. He found his dignity in the face of all the shame and indignity that had been foisted upon him, and he helped others on the row to find theirs.

Even as Hinton figured out how to live with dignity in a



demeaning situation, he never gave up trying to win his release. If he hadn't had the good fortune to finally be connected with the Equal Justice Initiative in the late 1980s, that release might never have happened. As it was, it didn't happen until 2015, through a rare unanimous ruling by the United States Supreme Court. Legal technicalities were among the many roadblocks Equal Justice Initiative director Bryan Stephenson encountered, but once acquainted with Hinton, he, too, never gave up.

In his foreword to the book, Stephenson challenges the reader to understand that Hinton's story really happened, that oth-

er stories like his happen in America, and that more of us need to do something to prevent such stories from happening again. Hinton was, he writes, "a poor man in a criminal justice system that treats you better if you are rich and guilty than if you are poor and innocent."

"We need to learn things about our criminal justice system, about the legacy of racial bias in America and the way it can blind us to just and fair treatment of people," Stephenson continues. "We need to understand the dangers posed by the politics of fear and anger that create systems like our capital punishment system and the political dynamics that have made some courts and officials act so irresponsibly ... We need to think about the fact that we are all worth more than the worst thing we have done. Anthony Ray Hinton's story helps us understand some of these problems and ultimately what it means to survive, to overcome, and to forgive."

This gripping book will help you learn these important things. I highly recommend it. ■

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