

MOSES



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

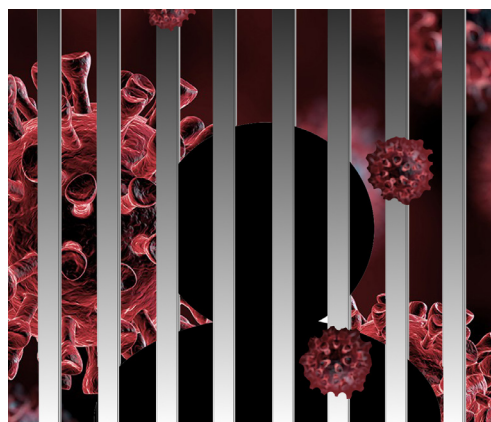
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MOSES and WISDOM Respond to COVID-19

by Alison Mix

Even before there were positive coronavirus cases in the Dane County Jail and at Waupun and Columbia Correctional Institutions, MOSES and WISDOM moved aggressively and purposefully to formulate strategies to advocate for the safety of the state's highly vulnerable incarcerated population. Living in often overcrowded conditions and unable to practice social distancing, those in our jails and prisons could be tragically impacted by the rapid spread of the virus.



cedure, approved by the Leadership Board, for creating position statements; previously, these submissions would have had to be made in the name of individuals.)

While appreciating the measures our sheriff has taken to limit the spread of the disease in the jail, these appeals,

also sent to multiple media outlets and public officials, urged the need for further, urgent action. The following statement, included in both submissions, captures the gist of MOSES's demands:

"We call on all authorities to stop incarcerating and immediately release anyone who does not pose a danger to the community. DOC should cease holds and sanctions for all but those who are actively dangerous. Judges and prosecutors should end pretrial detention and end or stay jail or prison sentences for all but those who are actively dangerous."

Gamaliel calls, WISDOM answers decisively

At the state level, WISDOM was focused on the Spring election and voter engagement

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MOSES Justice System Reform
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MOSES issues first ever position statements

By the third week of March, both entities had launched their campaigns in earnest. In the case of MOSES, it was the Justice System Reform Initiative, our single task force, that met (virtually by that point) and hammered out a plan of action. JSRI submitted both a [letter to the editor](#) and a longer [OpEd piece](#) to local newspapers, both as official MOSES positions. (This was only possible thanks to all the work done last year by the Ad Hoc Committee on Issues, culminating in a pro-

Response to COVID-19 continued from page one

right up until mid-March when, suddenly, everything changed. (We all know how quickly COVID-19 reoriented us all!). WISDOM and EXPO leaders went to work putting together an appeal to Governor Evers, to get elderly and ill people out of our prisons, to release people being held on crimeless revocations and other low-level offenses (or non-offenses), and to take other common-sense measures to dramatically reduce the prison population. On March 19th, Gamaliel, the national network WISDOM belongs to, held a Virtual Gathering, on the “urgent need to quickly reduce our nation’s jail and prison populations before the COVID-19 virus creates a complete disaster”. Soon afterwards, WISDOM’s leadership and task force conference calls, quickly moving to the ZOOM format, along with the those of the newly formed affiliate SIP (Supporters of Incarcerated People), began to focus almost exclusively on the coronavirus threat and what could be done to mitigate it. On the same day, WISDOM sent its [open letter](#) to Governor Evers and then called on its affiliates to contact him in support of it. Not wanting to create chaos for the Governor in a time of crisis, just

one person from each affiliate was asked to call his office, while others were urged to use email. In addition, people were urged to contact their state senators and assembly representatives expressing their concern regarding a COVID-19 outbreak in Wisconsin’s prisons, telling them we expect them to join us in calling on the Governor to take serious, immediate action and reminding them that the Governor currently has the power to do everything the letter calls on him to do.

On March 24th, the Wisconsin Public Health Association reached out to Governor Evers in a letter, basically in support of the steps WISDOM was asking for regarding the need to quickly reduce the prison population. WISDOM appealed to its members to forward that letter to their state senators and representatives. On the same day, WISDOM and EXPO began to circulate their “Petition to Protect Wisconsin Prisons from COVID-19.” More than 1100 people signed, and the petition was printed out and delivered as a hard copy to Governor Evers on March 27th, along with the open letter. ■

Core Group in the Spotlight: Grace Episcopal Church Raises \$1,500 at Fundraising Tea

by Margaret Irwin

As a pilot project, Grace Episcopal Church held a festive fundraising tea for MOSES on Feb. 13. Thirty-two members and friends of Grace enjoyed tea and goodies at the home of Jane Henning. MOSES President Rachel Morgan spoke movingly about our work, and Sister Joan Duerst, head of the MOSES Religious Leaders Caucus, added her perspective. Literature about MOSES was available for the guests, who appreciated learning more about our



Susan Webster, Lynn McDonald, Jane Henning, and Francine Hartman.

work for criminal justice reform.

Guests were asked to give \$35 or more, if possible, to support MOSES. In addition to raising \$1,500 in donations, the event also served as a way to publicize MOSES and more deeply connect people in the Grace Episcopal congregation to our mission.

Once we are beyond the COVID-19 crisis, others might consider doing something similar in their own faith community. ■

President's Message

by Rachel Morgan

MOSES is celebrating the hiring of its new Community Organizer, Mark Rice. Mark will take up his position on April 16, bringing his years of experience in organizing, policy work, and fundraising, among other skills, to our organization. He has been an integral part of the WISDOM network and promises to be a great asset to MOSES. Mark will have his work cut out for him, as MOSES continues to rise to the challenge of the COVID-19 crisis and its potentially devastating impact on Wisconsin's and Dane County's incarcerated populations.



Mark Rice, Community Organizer

As we sit in our homes, let us reflect on our sisters and brothers in the jails and prisons. WISDOM put out a letter to Governor Evers with recommendations on how to decrease the overcrowded prison system for the safety of those in Wisconsin correctional facilities. People have been writing emails to Evers in support and calling and writing their legislators to urge Evers to act now.

Both Waupun and Columbia Correctional Institutions have confirmed cases of this virus. Waupun's case was a doctor. The staff of their HSU (Health Services Unit) were sent home to be quarantined, and the patients were quarantined as well. Waupun now has nurses coming in from hospital settings. According to people imprisoned there, no one is wearing masks or gloves, not even the nurses. Staff is supposed to be cleaning, but according to reports from people at Waupun, measures to stave off the virus are minimal at best.

Columbia Correctional is on another lockdown, after being on lockdown off and on from Oct. 23 into January

with restricted movement. The incarcerated men are scared, and rightfully so. They are effectively in a mass quarantine, with guards and staff coming in without the use of gloves or masks. Reports from those inside the institution are similar to those from Waupun. People are fearful.

On March 23, Governor Evers halted new admissions into Wisconsin prisons, in an attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, this is putting a strain on our already overcrowded jail. MOSES's Justice System Reform Initiative (JSRI) took a position on how to decrease the jail population, such as working with the DOC Probation and Parole to do away with holds for sanctions or rule violations, and using signature bail and home monitoring.

The Sheriff's response was: "For many weeks partners in the Criminal Justice System, law enforcement, our D.A., our Court Commissioners and Judges, along with DOC and Community Corrections, have been meeting and working to find areas each can have impact on the numbers of individuals in jail, from finding alternatives to arrest and jail, reasonable bail, a halt of court cases for those scheduled to come to jail, and addressing non-violent misdemeanor warrants. We have worked closely with DOC to drive down the P&P holds for those that can be released."

Our Data Focus Group found that between 03/13/20 and 03/25/20 the jail population has gone down by 207 people.

Thank you to all who have advocated for the people in our correctional institutions who could be easily let go, and for your continued advocacy for those who cannot advocate for themselves. ■

Statewide Task Forces

WISDOM conference calls (605) 468-8012

- Old Law: April 11 and May 9 at 8:30 am (code 423950)
- Solitary Confinement: April 14 and May 12 at 4:00 pm (code 423950)
- Prison Prevention: April 14 and May 12 at 5:00 pm (code 423950)
- Post-Release: April 16 and May 21 at 7:30 pm (code 423951)

MOSES Meetings

Next MOSES monthly meetings

- Sunday, April 5, 2:30 pm via Zoom
- Sunday, May 2, 2:30 pm
- Sunday, June 6, 2:30 pm

Click on the calendar link at the MOSES website for details.

Smart Justice Lobby Day

by Margaret Irwin

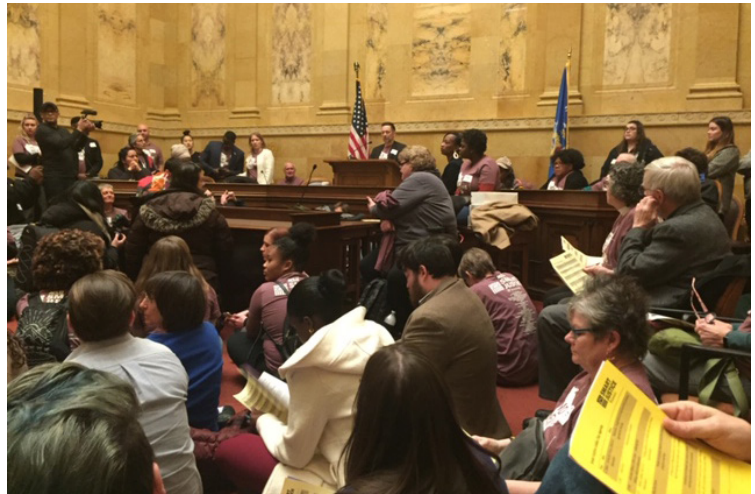
A standing-room-only crowd of over 300 people from around the state filled a State Capitol hearing room on Jan. 29 for Smart Justice Lobby Day. The event, where attendees were so numerous they actually overflowed the hearing room, was sponsored by the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and WISDOM, among others. Many MOSES members were part of the crowd, which represented over 31 senatorial and 63 assembly districts. The goal of Lobby Day was to urge legislators to adopt smart criminal justice reforms that would reduce prison populations, reduce recidivism, and make communities safer and stronger.

At the orientation session, we learned that Wisconsin spends \$1.2 billion on prisons each year – more than the national average, more than neighboring states, and more than is spent on the entire University of Wisconsin System.

One of the speakers, Lance Ley, described how crimeless revocation had overturned his efforts to be a productive citizen. While on extended supervision, Lance had built up a successful business. But someone made a false accusation against him, which led to a search of his home, and alcohol was found there. As a result, Ley was sent back to prison, his business closed, and 28 of his employees lost their jobs. He asked us to lobby against such injustice.

Following the orientation, we made visits to our representatives and senators to request action on four pending bills on these topics: Expungement Reform, Unlock the Vote, Crimeless Revocation, and Against the Shackling of Pregnant Women.

At the same time as we were lobbying, a large group of doctors, wearing traditional white coats, was also gathering in the Capitol Rotunda to lobby against the shackling of pregnant women. It's good to have allies! ■



State Watch

Worst Bills Vetoed, Best Also Fail to Pass

by Kate Mulligan

The 2019-2020 legislative session ended with a mixed message. The Democratic administration rallied against a number of bad bills and stopped a few of them. But progress on modest reform efforts by Democratic legislators was also stymied, because of lack of support by their Republican counterparts.

Republicans waited until mid-January to introduce a package of bills that was quickly scheduled for committee hearings and rushed to the Assembly and Senate for action. Passage of the “Tougher on Crime” package would have resulted in more people going to prison and staying there longer. It would have increased the number of juveniles in secure detention facilities.

The intent of these legislators was so clear and detrimental to reform efforts that it drew a protest from DOC Secretary Kevin Carr. He sent written testimony to the Assembly Committee on Corrections that urged a move from an “old school, ineffective mentality of ‘lock ‘em up and throw away the key’ to a smart, safe and rehabilitative approach. States like Texas and Michigan have changed laws and policies, reduced their prison population, closed prisons, and saved the taxpayer money, while increasing public safety!”

Despite Carr’s testimony, the most pernicious of the bills passed. Thankfully, Gov. Evers vetoed four of them and sent a statement to MOSES and other advocates that echoed Secretary Carr’s views.

Reform bills get a hearing

In a last-minute move, two of the three reform bills developed by Rep. Evan Goyke (D) and his colleagues also received a hearing by the Assembly Committee on Corrections. Those bills—which were reported on in the previous newsletter—would have added earned release programs that enable prisoners to shorten their stays and exit with new skills. They would also have set a maximum



of 30 days of incarceration for a noncriminal violation of supervision and allowed DOC greater use of short-term sanctions.

DOC representative Paulina de Haan testified that “Secretary Carr is committed to prioritizing and increasing programming at all of our facilities to provide adults in custody with the necessary tools, training, and treatment to become tax-paying citizens.” She added, “Reducing revocations has been a priority for this administration,

and DOC is working on proposals and policies to effect that change.”

Signs of bipartisan approaches

The differences between the two parties concerning criminal justice might appear insurmountable, but a few hopeful signs are emerging.

Rep. Shae Sortwell (R) testified in favor of AB 831, which would have reformed revocation policies. Sortwell pointed out that “the standards for people under supervision are often higher than the standards of law for everyone else.”

Rep. Michael Schraa (R) argued against the initial version of AB 805, which recommended that parole be revoked if a formerly incarcerated person is charged with a new crime. Schraa pointed out to Committee members that the bill would result in new prison construction, when funds could not be found to close Lincoln Hills.

Schraa, Sen. Darling (R), Rep. Goyke (D), and Sen. Lena Taylor (D) sent a letter to the Legislature in September emphasizing the importance of criminal justice reform and noting successful supervision and revocation systems in Texas and Michigan.

Finally, Goyke testified that “conservative-leaning groups like Americans for Prosperity, Tommy Thompson Center, The Badger Institute, and Right on Crime have joined with liberal-leaning groups like the ACLU and WISDOM.” ■

Why I Am a Sustaining Member of MOSES

by Bonnie Magnuson

I have more things to be grateful for than most folks. I was adopted by a wonderful family and fit the family profile. Trust me, that is more important than you might think. I realized fairly early on how many possible futures I could have had, depending on where and how I grew up. It could have been very different. I was given a good education and have been fortunate enough never to have had a job that I wouldn't have done for free. I married and had wonderful children who have made me exceedingly proud. I'm a cancer survivor, a diabetic, and an environmentalist. There are a zillion other good things in my life, too. MOSES is one of them.



Bonnie Magnuson

My husband was an English professor at NYU, and we had a fairly tight budget for most of our married life. English professors do not make top salaries, and the East Coast is expensive. So, probably like many of you, I made most of my early contributions to groups or organizations through sweat equity.

But now, widowed and more or less retired, I can afford to contribute more. And probably like you, I have a number of organizations I am grateful to for the work they do. I have personally benefited from many. But I

didn't want to give small amounts to many groups, which wouldn't make any real difference, nor could I give a lot of large (for me) contributions to more than one or two. Some groups, such as the Cancer Fund, national environmental groups, and children's organizations, can count on many generous donations. I decided instead to pick organizations doing vital work that were not as well-known and supported. I wanted something that would benefit both state and local issues and one that could make a huge difference, but one that most people didn't know much about. And since I had benefited so very much from sheer good luck, I wanted to help those who had had more than their share of bad luck.

I also decided that I would give a regular monthly amount. Having spent my life working in nonprofits, I know how insecure many groups are, not knowing what they can count on for income. I started regular monthly giving when I could afford no more than five dollars a month. I learned then that monthly payments were relatively painless. All of this is how I found my way to MOSES and being a sustaining member. I would urge you to give regularly as much as you can. ■

MOSES Raises Nearly \$6,000 with Community Shares

by Rachel Morgan

On March 3, Community Shares of Wisconsin held its Big Share, an opportunity for its 70 member organizations to do fundraising. This year there was a Super Power Hour, in which we could win a prize for the most funds raised or the most donors. Two generous people stepped forward to offer MOSES \$1,000 matches, and we were able to raise \$5,770, most of which came in during our Power Hour.

MOSES members did a livestream video on the ripple effects of incarceration, highlighting crimeless revocations. We did a true-to-life dramatization of a mother with three children, whom we followed from eviction to the day shelter and through an impossible search for affordable housing. The play ended with the youngest child asking, "Mommy, when are we going home?" Sad,

but true, for so many women and children who are left behind when partners and fathers are incarcerated.

This year, even though we didn't win any prizes, we were still able to raise money for our work and get our message out there. Thank you to all who acted in the play, and to all of you who supported us through the Big Share.

Our goal was to raise \$7,500. Giving can happen all year round by going to <https://www.thebigshare.org/organizations/moses-wisdom-of-madison>.

Consider helping us to still reach this goal. Thank you. ■



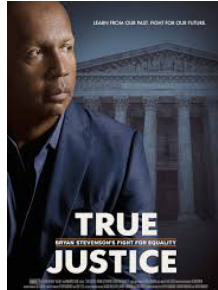
MOSES-Sponsored Showing of “True Justice” Attracts Record Audience to FUS Film Series

by Pam Gates

On March 6, First Unitarian Society held its First Friday Film series as usual, this time featuring a documentary on the life and work of Bryan Stevenson, author of the bestseller “Just Mercy” and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative. The event was organized by the FUS MOSES Ministry Team and co-hosted by MOSES Madison. First Fridays at FUS feature films of social significance and offer a free community meal before the film showing. Childcare and a children’s film are also offered.

“True Justice” drew a record crowd for a “first Friday” film, estimated at 75. The high turnout was due at least in part to the fame of the film’s subject, Mr. Stevenson, but also to extensive publicity and co-sponsorships, including the Wisconsin Network for Peace, Justice and Sustainability and WORT 89.9FM.

The film relates incidents in Stevenson’s youth that shaped his development, such as having a motel swimming pool quickly emptied of all the white children when he and his sister dove in. We learn about the strength



of his family members, particularly his mother and grandmother, and we hear from family members today who love and support him as he goes about trying to create a more equal justice system in this country.

We learn what an uphill battle that is. We meet Anthony Hinton, author of “The Sun Does Shine,” who was finally released from death row after Stevenson’s untiring, years-long efforts that took them all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. We meet Walter McMillian, also imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit; his is the story in the recently released film “Just Mercy.”

We watch as Stevenson leads kids to a lynching site, where they dig up jars of soil to commemorate the person who was lynched there. We see the Equal Justice Initiative headquarters in Montgomery, Ala., where we meet and hear from his staff and the striking memorial he’s creating to honor the Americans who were lynched.

The film is beautifully done and seems quite thorough; it is also long, probably unnecessarily so. But all in all, I highly recommend it. It describes and honors the critically important pioneering justice work of a man who, I believe, is one of the true heroes of our time. ■



Opposing Viewpoints: Mass Incarceration

by Rebecca Aldridge, editor

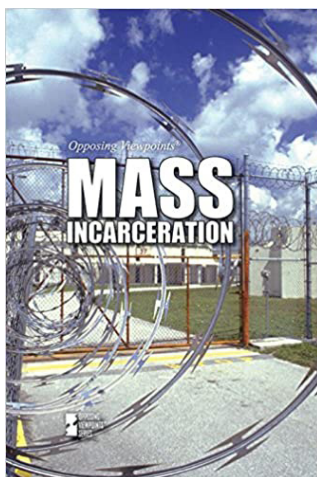
reviewed by Pam Gates

Mass Incarceration is part of a series called Opposing Viewpoints, which offers, as the name implies, opposing viewpoints on topics of critical importance today. The series is clearly aimed at students, either high school or college, but it's useful for anyone considering this or any other topic of major importance.

Mass Incarceration contains five chapters, each addressing an aspect of our mass incarceration system: effectiveness, societal effects, perceptions of crime, how we handle crime, and – perhaps a bit simplistically, at least in its title – whether there are problems with our prison system. Each chapter is subdivided into four to six brief sections written by different experts in the field, with, of course, differing opinions. For example, Marc Mauer, founder of The Sentencing Project, collaborates on a subchapter titled: “The Relationship Between Incarceration and Crime Is Limited.” The other sections in that chapter argue the ineffectiveness of mass incarceration, espouse more police on the streets, and express dismay about how to solve the nation's drug habit.

Each subchapter is written by someone considered, for one reason or another, to be an expert. Each is fairly brief and is prefaced with a few questions for the reader to ponder as s/he reads. Each chapter concludes with a bibliography, and many subchapters are heavily footnoted. As a final bonus, each chapter is supplemented with discussion questions. A church social action group might find this book a useful tool for reading and discussion, as might a library book group. Presumably we will someday have the ability to participate in such events again!

I found *Mass Incarceration* an interesting and useful



book, one worth having just for the bibliographies. There is also a list at the end of the book of 11 organizations to contact for further information. Among these are the Friends Committee on National Legislation, the ACLU, the Heritage Foundation, The Sentencing Project, the American Correctional Association, and the U.S. Dept. of Justice Bureau of Prisons.

The pros and cons of private prisons are, of course, one of the topics addressed. Do they increase capacity, improve service, and save money? Or do they expose prisoners to more violence, hinder reform, and increase recidivism? These points are

argued in Chapter 2's subchapters.

Perhaps the greatest new thing I learned was the enormous power of the state, a point made in one of the subchapters. Somehow I'd still been thinking that each of us has the ability to act autonomously – but we don't. Our limits are very carefully delineated, and once one comes under the thumb of the state, it is extremely difficult to extricate oneself. It is good that students at least be offered an understanding of this early in their lives. At the very least, it might help those who manage to keep clear of the criminal justice system to better understand their fellow humans who don't.

Mass Incarceration offers many thoughts from many experts on different aspects of the problem. It is worth reading oneself and offering to a young person – or to anyone who hasn't considered mass incarceration in depth. Locking up our fellow humans en masse is indeed a major issue of our time.

Note: A Room of One's Own, an independent bookstore in downtown Madison, will order and ship books to you during this time. ■

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