



## WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **Wrongly Convicted Reentry Act Introduced**

Madison – Innocent people wrongfully convicted could see additional relief upon their court-ordered release under a bill introduced today with bipartisan support.

The Wrongly Convicted Reentry Act would increase the maximum compensation an innocent inmate could receive for their false imprisonment from \$5,000 per year with an aggregate cap of \$25,000 - currently the lowest in the nation - to the federal level, which is \$50,000 per year with no aggregate cap.

“People may not want to admit it, but sometimes our criminal justice system fails, and when it does, it can ruin a person’s life,” said Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Madison). “If the unthinkable should happen, we should do everything in our power to help an innocent person make a successful transition back into society.”

In addition to changing financial compensation levels, which haven’t been changed since 1980, the bill also requires the Department of Corrections to initiate the process of assisting a wrongly convicted person with getting access to social services, similarly to current procedure for inmates upon their release. The bill also provides transitional financial assistance, improves timeliness for compensation claims and reimbursement for attorney and court fees.

“The current best case scenario for wrongly convicted individuals is that their legal appeal works and they earn their immediate freedom, only to be left penniless in a strange city with no place to sleep,” said Rep. Garey Bies (R-Sister Bay). “It is our responsibility as a fair and just society to take care of those we’ve wronged.”

Currently, inmates begin receiving reentry services by the DOC months before their release date. Upon release those inmates then receive access to services such as housing, food stamps, job search assistance and counseling. However, wrongly convicted individuals are released immediately without any reentry assistance.

“Our financial compensation to the wrongly convicted is the worst in the country,” said Sen. Spencer Coggs (D-Milwaukee). “This bill not only addresses the limited compensation rate, but also ensures individuals receive immediate financial assistance in a timely and efficient manner.”

The bill was a product of collaboration with the Wisconsin Innocence Project, which utilizes law students to assist wrongly convicted inmates in regaining their freedom.

“If you are guilty of committing a crime, you get more help from the state upon your release than an innocent person and that’s just plain wrong,” said Keith Findley, founder and co-director of the Wisconsin Innocence Project.

Bies, Pocan and Coggs circulated the bipartisan bill for co-sponsors amongst their colleagues today.