



**Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy
Testimony on Assembly Bill 345
May 30, 2017**

Thank you Representative Neylon and members of the Jobs and the Economy Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 345. My name is Tom Lyons. I am the Wisconsin State Director for Right on Crime. Right on Crime is a national campaign of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, in partnership with the American Conservative Union Foundation and Justice Fellowship that supports fighting crime, prioritizing victims, and protecting taxpayers.

AB 345 creates the necessary statutory framework to permit state prisoners to transfer to county jails for the purposes of allowing work and job training opportunities. Most prisoners will leave prison alive. Adjusting back to free society while using the programming supplied by DOC is critical to successful reentry.

Gaining job training and employment is an important tool to reduce recidivism. In 2015, the Manhattan Institute released a study showing the connecting between job and reentry. The results were non-violent offenders reoffended twenty percent less than non-employed non-violent offenders. Further, the study revealed the sooner an offender was employed after their sentence, the less likely they were to reoffend. AB 345 takes advantage of these findings by providing the opportunity to have employment and experience in place prior to release.

Release for work and work-training purposes will also assist victims owed restitution. The repayment of restitution was made a priority by the legislature last year when it passed into law Act 355. The Act requires restitution be paid back in full before other fees and fines are addressed. Prisoners employed by Badger State Industries earn approximately a dollar per hour. Prisoners employed through other programs at DOC typically earn significantly less. Prisoners employed out of a local jail will have significant more earning potential and provide quicker reimbursement to harmed victims.

The bill limits the release of prisoners to only those local authorities with the necessary components to get a successful job program into place. Given the strong relationship between having a job and not reoffending, counties and organizations who take advantage of AB 345 will see the benefits of a more employed population and a safer community.



DAN FEYEN

STATE SENATOR

18th Senate District
(608) 266-5300
Sen.Feyen@legis.wi.gov

PO Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882
<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/18/feyen>

To: The Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy
From: Sen. Dan Feyen
Re: Assembly Bill 345

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing today.

This legislation was originally a portion of the Governor's budget proposal. It was removed when all non-fiscal policy items were pulled from the budget. We are introducing this legislation in a stand-alone bill with the full support of the Department of Corrections. They will be testifying later today.

This legislation allows the Department of Corrections to contract with county jails to send inmates back to their county of origin to participate in local work release or other approved programs.

The intention of this program is to allow inmates with a good record of behavior and completion of training programs who are close to their release date to return to their county of origin, establish a relationship with a local employer, and ease the overall process of re-entry upon release. This program is a great tool for the correctional system to use to ensure inmates receive as seamless of a transition as possible in order to reduce recidivism rates, assist with post-release employment, and re-integrate into society. Studies have proven inmates who participate in a work release program have lower recidivism rates. Research also shows inmates who participate in a work release program are up to two times more likely to obtain employment during the first 3 months after release than those who did not participate in a work release program.

There are a few important details of how the program would function to note:

- Participation would be **optional** for county sheriffs, tribal jails, and houses of correction. If they choose to participate, the contractual obligations of both the DOC and the county would be clearly articulated in a MOU.
- Reimbursement rates to counties would be guaranteed and keep with current statutory limits for other contracts between DOC and counties.
- This program in no way infringes upon the current Huber release program.
- Sheriffs could at any time cease participation in the program and return the inmate to a DOC facility.

Financially, this legislation would be a win for taxpayers. It costs between \$80 and \$100 or more per day to house an inmate in Wisconsin's correctional system, depending on which estimate you reference. Under this program, DOC would be paying counties \$60 a day or less depending on the terms of their MOU. Counties with empty beds would also be benefitting as their facility would increase its income by contracting with DOC.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



MICHAEL SCHRAA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 53RD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Office: (608) 267-7990
Toll-Free: (608) 534-0053
Rep.Schraa@legis.wi.gov

Testimony on Assembly Bill 345

Thank you, Chairman Neylon and Committee Members, for this opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 345, which allows for some inmates to find employment as they near their release dates.

As you are well aware, the Department of Corrections faces many challenges, not the least of which is an increasing number of prisoners. Of course, this takes a toll on taxpayers, but it also takes a toll on individuals, families, and society as a whole. The first concern is always public safety. However, when an inmate has served his or her time, and is going to return to the community, it is in everyone's best interest to make this process as smooth as possible.

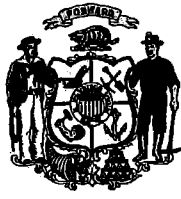
Academics may not agree on the definition of recidivism, but most of us just want offenders to go home, find a job, and be a productive member of society who doesn't commit any more crimes.

The most important step in that scenario is finding a job. Not every inmate leaving prison has the job skills or the people skills necessary to be a hot commodity on the job market. Not every employer wants to take a risk on hiring an ex-con. It's not hard to imagine how an unemployed parolee soon imagines himself or herself to be unemployable and eventually resorts to crime to feed the family.

This bill is a common-sense solution to that dilemma. It just makes sense to allow soon-to-be-released inmates to be moved to the county jail and to work towards employment which can continue upon release. This isn't a good fit for every inmate, and it's not something that every county would want to do. Still, it seems sensible to at least allow the Department of Corrections to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with local governments who want to give it a try.

How would this look? It depends upon the Memorandum of Understanding. I picture an inmate who has earned a high school diploma. He or she has developed some job skills, and is being transferred to his local county jail some months before the scheduled release date. There might be some trips to the job center to get help on writing a resume and completing job applications. Hopefully, this will lead to some interviews and employment. An inmate who establishes a solid relationship with an employer is laying a firm foundation for success. One week the inmate is transported to work from the jail, and the next week he or she goes back to that same job from home. It's hard to imagine a smoother transition.

Thank you again for hearing this bill and for your attention. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.



Scott Walker
Governor

Jon E. Litscher
Secretary

Mailing Address

3099 E. Washington Ave.
Post Office Box 7925
Madison, WI 53707-7925
Telephone (608) 240-5000
Fax (608) 240-3300

State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Assembly Bill 345/ Senate Bill 264

Speaking in Favor

Chairman, members of the committee. Thank you for holding a hearing on the bill and thank you for allowing the Department to testify on this legislative proposal.

I want to thank the authors, Representative Schraa and Senator Feyen for drafting this legislation and allowing the agency to work with them as it came together.

The Department of Corrections currently has 10 work release centers located around the state and the system works well, inmates receive valuable work experience, on the job training, as well as learning the soft skills that come with holding down a job, i.e. keeping a work schedule, interacting with supervisors, other employees and the feeling of accomplishment when a job is well done.

The Department supports the concept of partnering with counties, tribes and the house of corrections to expand reentry employment opportunities for inmates that meet criteria agreed upon by the county jail, house of corrections or tribe and the department of corrections.

AB345/SB264 is permissive in that it allows counties, tribes, the House of Corrections and DOC to negotiate the details of the MOU to bring Inmates back to their county of origin while on minimum security custody status near the completion of their sentence, allowing the inmate to begin looking for work and re integrating into their community, supervised by both the unit of government housing the inmate and their assigned probation and parole agent.

Thank you again for holding a hearing on AB345

The department of corrections supports AB345/SB264

The Agency is aware of an amendment to add "superintendent" to (section 3) page 2 line 18 and supports that amendment

Respectfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald R. Friske".

Donald R. Friske
Director of Legislative affairs
Wisconsin Department of Corrections