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*Linking communities across Wisconsin to work for justice*

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Join the *Transformational Justice Campaign* leaders of EXPO and WISDOM for:

## **Taking On Mass Incarceration in Wisconsin** a 5-part Zoom series

**When:** Thursday evenings, 6:30-8:00 p.m., January 27, February 3, 10, 17, 24

**Register here:** [Taking on Mass Incarceration - Jan 27-Feb 24](#)

Or by scanning QR code below

In the series, we will learn from experts, including people directly impacted by Wisconsin's criminal legal system. We will learn about many aspects of the system, including:

- **Front End Issues:** Things that happen BEFORE a person goes to jail or prison, like the "school to prison pipeline," policing practices, and the availability of alternatives to incarceration, especially for people with mental health and/or addiction issues;
- **Sentencing:** How Wisconsin's sentencing policies and practices have added to prison populations and have resulted in more elderly and seriously ill people behind bars;
- **Conditions of Confinement:** Including how the use of Solitary Confinement makes prisons less safe, and makes rehabilitation harder;
- **Crimeless Revocations, Probation, Parole and Extended Supervision:** How Wisconsin's overuse of "Supervision" leads to unnecessary incarceration and unnecessary hardship for people after they are released from prison;
- **Bringing More People Home:** How programs like "Earned Release" and "Compassionate Release" can be used to reduce the number of people in prison;
- **Local Issues:** How local campaigns and local elections can make a difference.

Besides learning *about* the system and how it works, you will learn how **YOU can be part of the effort to make a difference**. The series will show a variety of "on-ramps" for people who want to be part of the solution. There will be options for people without much time, and options for people who want to be deeply involved in an issue. The goal will be to help **everyone** find a place in the campaign for change.

The series is open to everyone – including "beginners" who only know that there is a problem and that they want to help. We also encourage veterans of the campaign for reform to participate. Together, we want to build the campaign that can reverse the injustices addressed on the other side of this document.

### **Questions?**

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**Register here:**



## What is at Stake: Which Wisconsin Do We Want to Be?

Wisconsin is one of the best places to live in the nation. We enjoy a beautiful natural environment, an excellent educational system, and renowned health care. We think of ourselves as a friendly, caring people. At the same time, we confront realities that reveal that Wisconsin is failing in its treatment of people of color.

The national Sentencing Project recently released a report showing that Wisconsin is *still* the state that incarcerates the highest percentage of its African American residents. Here is a link to the report: [\*The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons\*](#). Or you can download it from [WISDOMWisconsin.org](http://WISDOMWisconsin.org). Please read and share this report, especially the table on page 6.

Wisconsin incarcerates 1 out of every 36 Black adults, far above the national average of 1 out of 81. While only 6% of Wisconsin's population identifies as African American, they make up 42% of the state prison population. Wisconsin's incarceration rate for African Americans is 12 times the rate for white adults.

The report notes a series of factors that have placed African Americans and others at significant disadvantage. These include but are not limited to poverty, education outcomes, unemployment history, and criminal history. It further reports that the totality of the research literature on race and ethnic differentials in imprisonment lead to a clear conclusion: ***the racial disparity in prison populations cannot be explained by racial patterns of criminal behavior. The system itself is racist.***

Many states have begun to chip away at their incarceration rate. Nine states, led by Republicans and Democrats, have *lowered* their prison population by *30% or more* in recent years. This decline has been accomplished through a mix of reforms that reduce prison admissions as well as lengths of stay in prison. Other research has shown that those reductions have not compromised public safety.

In contrast, Wisconsin has made no major reform to its policies and practices, but blindly sticks with the expensive, failing Truth In Sentencing scheme passed in 1999, which increased most sentences by 50%. The report notes that *"harsh punishment policies, some of which were put into effect after crime began to decline in the early 1990s, are the main cause of the historic rise in imprisonment that has occurred over the past 40 years."*

Failed policies like Truth in Sentencing, and ongoing practices that reinforce and worsen racial disparities have kept Wisconsin as the state with the highest incarceration rate for African-Americans in the entire country.

Many people of faith and ethical principle in Wisconsin believe we are called to build the "Beloved Community" about which Dr. King often spoke. We need to ask what our values say about this shocking disparity in whom we incarcerate. We need to ask how our faith traditions call on us to respond. We do not believe that silence is an option. **We value redemption, restoration, healing, second chances, and the alleviation of human suffering.** Please join WISDOM in working for racial equity and for transformation of our criminal legal system.

We know we can be better than this.