



JILL BILLINGS
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Testimony in support of Assembly Bill 615
Municipal Prisoners Bill
Assembly Committee on Corrections
February 6, 2014

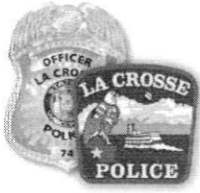
I'd like to thank Chairman Bies and the rest of the Committee for holding this public hearing today on AB 615- the Municipal Prisoners Bill. This bill originated from a conversation I had with the City of La Crosse Police Chief regarding an increase in the amount the county charges the city for housing a municipal prisoner in the county jail. According to City of La Crosse Assistant Police Chief Robert Abraham, the fee was increased from \$55 per day, to \$90 per day.

This increase has been particularly hard for the city police department to absorb. However, a neighboring Minnesota County has proposed a solution that is a win-win for all involved - Houston County, in Minnesota, is offering to house La Crosse's municipal prisoners in their county jail at a less expensive rate. Houston County is happy to take our city prisoners because they have the extra room. At the same time, La Crosse County has indicated to me that they have no objection to sending our municipal prisoners across state lines to Houston County, because they have no room in their county jail.

The reason I am here today is that the only thing preventing us from realizing this solution is a current statute. Wisconsin State Statute Section 800.095(1)(b)(3) requires city prisoners be housed in the county where the cause of action arose. My bill, AB 615, would create an exception to the current statute, by adding a subsection to allow a municipal prisoner to be housed in a neighboring county, either inside or outside of Wisconsin, if three criteria are met. The three requirements of AB 615 are:

- 1) The other county borders the county in which the cause of action arose;
- 2) The monthly expenses charged to the municipality by the other county to imprison the defendant are at least 25 percent less than the monthly expenses charged by the county in which the cause of action arose;
- 3) The other county agrees to have the defendant committed to a jail in that county.

Finally, the most important thing to note about AB 615 is that it is purely voluntary. In other words, if sending municipal prisoners to a neighboring county does not result in cost savings, a city can choose to keep their municipal prisoners in their county jail. However, for places like La Crosse, a city that is looking for a less-expensive option for housing municipal prisoners - an answer to our problem lies right next door. AB 615 will make this solution a reality.



Department of Police

RONALD J. TISCHER, CHIEF



TO: Assembly Committee on Corrections
FROM: La Crosse Police Chief Ronald Tischer
RE: Testimony in Support of AB 615
DATE: February 6, 2014

I'd like to thank committee-chair Representative Bies and committee members for the opportunity to speak in support of Assembly Bill 615 today. My name is Ronald Tischer, and I am the City of La Crosse Police Chief.

I am here to urge passage of AB 615 because this bill will help to address issues facing both the City of La Crosse and La Crosse County. It is also my belief that AB 615 will not only help the City of La Crosse, but it has the potential to help other municipalities and counties with prisoner housing issues around our State.

For the City of La Crosse, this will help us financially by saving taxpayer funds in housing our municipal prisoners. In 2013, the cost to municipalities to house a municipal prisoner at the La Crosse County jail nearly doubled. While the La Crosse Municipal Court uses commitment warrants as a last resort in holding people accountable for their actions, the fact is, there will always be those individuals who will refuse to respect the court's decision and warrants will be issued.

In looking at our 2012 municipal prisoners, the City of La Crosse averaged 4.34 prisoners daily at the La Crosse County Jail. Our total cost to house those prisoners was approximately \$79,000. Using those same prisoner numbers under the 2013 cost increase would have cost the City of La Crosse approximately \$124,000 and using those same numbers with our preliminary cost discussions with Houston, County the costs would have been approximately \$77,000.

The City of La Crosse understands that the La Crosse County jail operates at capacity and respects the fact that limited bed space should be reserved for serious criminal offenders in keeping our community safe. This is why both the Sheriff and I agree that AB 615 is in the best interest for everyone.

The City of La Crosse has been in discussions with Houston County, MN who recently completed a new jail project. We were ready to implement a contract with them when we

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discovered the language in State Statute 800.095 which prevented us from doing so. We are also aware that neighboring Monroe County is projected to build a new jail facility. These new facilities have the potential to not only save municipal tax dollars, but also the potential to help with over-crowding issues for county jails that are at capacity and also have the potential to be a source of revenue for new jail facilities who are not at capacity.

The beauty behind AB 615 is that this is a voluntary decision. It does not force an outside county to take prisoners. It provides municipalities with options and it will provide relief to overcrowded county jails.

Currently, counties are allowed to transfer sentenced prisoners to other counties and the State of Wisconsin in the past has transferred sentenced prisoners to other states to house prisoners, all the for the same reasons that municipalities will benefit from AB 615.

With that I will conclude my testimony but I am happy to answer any questions from the committee. Thank you.



Sheriff's Office
County of La Crosse, Wisconsin

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Web Site: www.co.la-crosse.wi.us

STEVEN J. HELGESON
SHERIFF

JEFFREY A. WOLF
CHIEF DEPUTY

TO: Assembly Committee on Corrections
FROM: La Crosse County Sheriff Steve Helgeson
RE: Testimony in Support of AB 615
DATE: February 6, 2014

I'd like to thank committee-chair Representative Bies and committee members for the opportunity to speak in support of Assembly Bill 615 today. My name is Steve Helgeson and I am the La Crosse County Sheriff.

I am here to urge passage of AB 615 because the bill will help to address two issues facing La Crosse County. The first is that our county jail has a limited ability to take on more prisoners, and the second is the question of where to house municipal prisoners.

Given the current configuration of the La Crosse County jail at the moment, the jail is at capacity. As a result, we do not have the necessary resources to house municipal prisoners from the city of La Crosse. To do so would mean increased costs related to staff time, bed space, and overall jail administrative expenses. Houston County, however, is in an ideal position to take on these prisoners and is happy to do so. They are even willing to cover the transportation costs associated with taking the municipal prisoners to and from Houston County in Minnesota.

Given the fact that we are presented with this unique solution - whereby Houston County is ready and willing to help La Crosse city and county by taking on our municipal prisoners, I am here today to ask your support AB 615.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this letter of support.