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Dear Committee Members on the 2014 Legislative Council Study Committee on Problem-Solving Courts, Alternatives, and Diversions:

As you wade through the studies and reports and listen to testimony regarding alternatives to incarceration programs, I feel compelled to bring to your attention the explosion of crime that is occurring in Milwaukee.

In the past few days the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel has run the following stories:

Teenage robbery suspects strike Milwaukee officer with van

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/crime/teenage-robbery-suspects-strike-milwaukee-officer-with-van-b99334119z1-271907891.html>

Woman sexually assaulted, robbed on Milwaukee's east side

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/crime/woman-sexually-assaulted-robbed-on-milwaukees-east-side-b99334185z1-271914251.html>

Why are auto thefts rising in Milwaukee but dropping in New York City?

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/crime/why-are-auto-thefts-rising-in-milwaukee-but-dropping-in-new-york-city-b99330000z1-271098211.html>

Motorcyclist accused of firing at vehicle on Highway 41 near Miller Park

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/traffic/2-lanes-closed-on-highway-41-sb-as-police-investigate-b99332720z1-271672531.html>

Aside from this small sample, hundreds of crime incidents occur daily that fail to make the newspaper. It is sad to say but some parts of the city are a war zone with gun fire so common that citizens do not even report it to the police. Our citizens should not have to live in fear.

The crime problem is not unique to Milwaukee. As the heroin epidemic grows, many other areas around the state are seeing significant increases in crime.

Proponents of alternative and diversionary programs often tell us that too many people are incarcerated and our prisons and jails are filled with significant numbers of individuals convicted of “non-violent” crimes. Many of the reports presented to this committee seem to back up those claims. It may be difficult to determine whether or not these reports conclusively pinpoint the cause of the results they portray.

Knowing what methodology was utilized in preparing those reports and comparing that to the methodology used in other reports from a variety of organizations is paramount for having confidence in the information being relied upon to make decisions.

Many other questions need to be asked as well. For instance: Who are these “non-violent offenders”? What types of crimes are they in prison for? What is their criminal history? Who is sentencing them to prison and why? What is the cost of crime recidivism to victims?

In the 1990’s the legislature went down a similar path of promoting the idea of expanded alternatives to incarceration which resulted in the creation of the Intensive Sanctions Program. After a few short years, DOC ended the program because it was a disaster.

The safety of our constituents and their families is one of most important tasks we have as elected officials. Developing criteria to independently rate the findings of these studies and reports would be helpful for future decision making and would reduce the risk that any action taken would add to already unacceptably high levels of crime.

Thank you for your consideration,