



State Senator Sheila Harsdorf

Date: March 6, 2014

To: Senate Committee on Transportation, Public Safety, and Veterans and Military Affairs

Fr: Senator Sheila Harsdorf

Re: Senate Bill 648 – Placing county and municipal prisoners in bordering out-of-state counties

Dear Chair Petrowski and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 648 (SB 648), which seeks to provide municipalities and counties the ability to contract with adjacent counties in neighboring states to house municipal or county prisoners.

This is a commonsense change to state law that recognizes the unique limitations that border communities face. While state statutes allow local governments to contract with other local governments within Wisconsin to hold prisoners, border counties and municipalities are limited by geography to the number of partners they may contract with to find cost savings.

This is an issue I have worked on for some time given concerns raised by a county in my district. When this county's jail became overcrowded, their best opportunity to find relief was through contracting with their neighboring county in Minnesota. Unfortunately, neither state at that time had authorizing legislation in place to allow for such transfers of local prisoners across state lines.

Minnesota in recent years has enacted authorizing legislation to allow their counties to contract with local governments in other states relating to prisoner transfers. SB 648 would provide that authority to local governments in Wisconsin.

SB 648 is limited in its scope to only Wisconsin border counties and municipalities in those counties and only would allow transfers to border counties in a neighboring state. Additionally, the local governments must realize cost savings of at least 25% in their monthly expenses in order to exercise their authority under this bill. Since county prisoners may be convicted of crimes that have longer jail sentences, SB 648 would also require counties to include the same criteria in their agreements with out-of-state counties as state statutes require of the Department of Corrections when they contract with other states to receive Wisconsin prisoners.

I urge the Committee's support for this measure as a means to providing local governments with options as they seek cost savings and safe conditions for their jail staff and prison populations. Thank you again for holding a hearing on this measure. I would welcome the opportunity to take questions.



JILL BILLINGS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 648

Inmate Transfer Bill

*Senate Committee on Transportation, Public Safety, Veterans, and
Military Affairs
March 6, 2014*

I'd like to thank Chairman Petrowski and the rest of the Committee for holding this public hearing today on SB 648. 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.

It has been difficult for some border communities to balance their budgets due to growing inmate expenses. However, some counties across state lines are willing to work towards a solution. For example, 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.

Right now counties are able to send their county prisoners to other counties within Wisconsin – this bill expands that to include counties outside of Wisconsin and municipal prisoners. SB 648 creates an exception to the current statute, by allowing prisoners to be housed in a neighboring county, either inside or outside of Wisconsin, if three criteria are met. The three requirements of SB 648 for transferring prisoners 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 SB 648 is that it is purely voluntary. In other words, if sending prisoners to a neighboring county does not result in cost savings, the locality can choose to keep their prisoners in their county jail. However, for places like La Crosse, a city that is looking for a less-expensive option for housing prisoners - an answer to our problem lies right next door. SB 648 will make this solution a reality.



Sheriff's Office
County of La Crosse, Wisconsin

Courthouse & Law Enforcement Center • 333 Vine St • Rm 1500
La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601-3296
Administrative Calls: (608) 785-9629 • Fax: (608) 785-5640
Non-Emergency Dispatch: (608) 785-5942
Web Site: www.co.la-crosse.wi.us

STEVEN J. HELGESON
SHERIFF

JEFFREY A. WOLF
CHIEF DEPUTY

FROM: La Crosse County Sheriff Steve Helgeson

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 648

DATE: March 6, 2014

I'd like to thank committee-chair Senator Petrowski and committee members for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 648 today. My name is Steve Helgeson and I am the La Crosse County Sheriff.

I am here to urge passage of SB 648 because the bill will allow counties to send prisoners across the state border. This is particularly important for La Crosse as a border county.

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, Minnesota, however, right across the border 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, I am here today to ask your support SB 648.

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