

Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

Testimony on Senate Bill 172

January 14, 2020

Thank you Chairman Stroebel and members of the Committee on Government Operations, Technology and Consumer Protection for hearing Senate Bill 172 (SB 172) today.

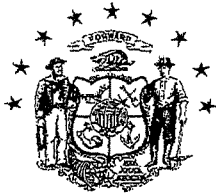
The Wisconsin Department of Corrections currently faces critical staffing issues as the number of vacant positions continue to rise. According to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau, in 2017-2018, position vacancies resulted in the largest use of overtime, accounting for 844,195 hours. This cost the taxpayers over \$25.5 million. Further, the vacancy rate across institutions in 2018 climbed to 13.36%, up from 11.74% in years prior. Vacancies are highest in maximum security institutions with Waupun Correctional Institution experiencing the highest rate at nearly 20%. This threatens the safety of both the guards and the inmates.

SB 172 eliminates an unnecessary statute to help the Department of Corrections fill these vacancies by allowing them to advertise employment opportunities on billboards. No such prohibition is imposed on any other state department. While doing so will not guarantee zero vacancies, this will provide DOC with more options to fill necessary staff positions and therefore increase the safety of everyone inside our prisons.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman and committee members for hearing SB 172. I urge you to pass this common sense bill.

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WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DAVID BOWEN

10TH DISTRICT

Senate Bill 172
Public Testimony of Rep. David Bowen
January 14, 2020

Chairman Stroebel and Members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Technology and Consumer Protection,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of Senate Bill 172 relating to the use of billboards to recruit Department of Corrections (DOC) employees.

Position vacancies have become increasingly common in our DOC facilities, causing current staff to fill designated shifts resulting in increased overtime. In Fiscal Year 2018, overtime costs at the Division of Adult Institutions exceeded \$50,000,000. This is almost a 15% increase from just two years prior. As a state, our incarcerated population is almost 25% more than what our system was designed for, and it is projected to continue to rise. This will only exacerbate the already dire staffing crisis in our DOC facilities.

Current law does not allow the Department of Corrections to use billboards to recruit employees. This is highly unusual since no other state agency is expressly barred from using billboards for recruiting vacant positions. At a time when the DOC is struggling to staff their crowded facilities, they should be allowed to use common sense, effective tools to recruit eligible applicants.

Additionally, there are unintended consequences of this current law exemption that could make the staffing crisis and recruitment efforts even worse. There is one federally operated prison in Central Wisconsin and five federally operated prisons within 50 miles of the Wisconsin border. While the DOC is expressly barred from using billboards to recruit employees, there is no such prohibition for the Federal Government to advertise position vacancies in prisons run by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. This means the Federal Government would be able to advertise position vacancies in their facilities on billboards near our state facilities, putting Wisconsin at a distinct disadvantage in our efforts to recruit and retain qualified candidates for our understaffed correctional institutions.

This bill alone will not solve the current staffing crisis in DOC facilities, but would be a tool that the DOC can use as part of a more holistic recruitment strategy.

I would like to thank Rep. Schraa, Sen. Wanggaard, and Sen. Taylor for working on this issue with me, and look forward to continued bipartisan conversations and legislation to address issues in our criminal justice system and correctional institutions.

