



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

JESSE JAMES

September 14th, 2021

Representative Jesse James' Testimony in Support of AB 397

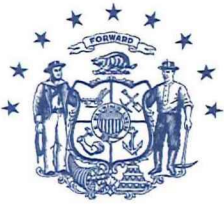
Chairman Schraa and other committee members:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Assembly Bill 397, which will allow the Department of Corrections to use billboards to recruit employees. I don't understand why a law that prevents something like this from taking place is on our books, but we have an opportunity to change this.

I was inspired to re-introduce this bill while working in my law enforcement capacity. I saw lawn signs at street intersections that were mixed in with others such as thrift sale signs, except these signs were attempting to recruit officers for the Stanley Correctional Facility. The lawn signs offered dates and times for a walk-in application and interview process at the Stanley Correctional Facility. I imagine that this advertisement tactic assisted a little bit with the recruitment process, but I believe it is time to allow DOC to utilize platforms on a larger scale.

Last winter and spring, I would leave Madison and see a billboard heading north on I-94 that was attempting to recruit corrections officers. I took a picture of it and sought out information, as I knew it was against the law to use a billboard for state recruitment. After sharing the photograph, I was informed this was a billboard to recruit federal level corrections officers. Again, this is something the Department of Corrections cannot do at the state level. This doesn't make sense to me, and those I have discussed this issue with back at home are dumbfounded about this law as well.

So many industries around our state are suffering due to workforce shortages, and this area is no exception. I am hearing the Stanley Correctional Institute is short staffed at this time, and I am positive other facilities are hurting for employees as well. It is time we allow our Department of Corrections to have the ability to use the resources available and place recruitment advertising on our billboards throughout our highways in Wisconsin. Thank you.



Public Testimony of Rep. David Bowen
Assembly Bill 397
September 14, 2021

Chairman Schraa and Members of the Assembly Committee on Corrections,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of Assembly Bill 397 relating to the use of billboards to recruit Department of Corrections employees.

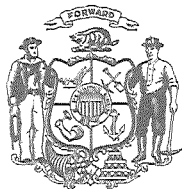
Position vacancies have become increasingly common in our DOC facilities, causing current staff to fill designated shifts resulting in increased overtime. Every year, this increased overtime costs the taxpayers of Wisconsin tens of millions of dollars. In Milwaukee County alone, 33% of our correctional officer positions are unfilled. In Waupun, the Department of Corrections was required to take the drastic step of pulling correctional officers from other facilities across the state to help fill the over 40% vacancy rate at the Waupun Correctional Institution. This is unsustainable. Our prisons are overbooked and our correctional officers are overworked, creating an unsafe environment for incarcerated individuals and staff alike.

Unfortunately, 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 facilities, they should be allowed to use common sense, effective tools to recruit eligible employees.

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 exemption 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 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 one tool the DOC will be able to use as part of a more holistic recruitment approach. Last session, this bill passed out of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Technology and Consumer Protection on a unanimous vote, and I see no reason why this bill cannot move through this committee in a similar fashion.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify in support of this bill. I look forward to not only seeing this bill pass this committee unanimously, but I also look forward to continued bipartisan legislation to reform our criminal justice and correctional system.



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

Testimony on Assembly Bill 397

September 14, 2021.

Thank you Chairman Schraa and members of the Corrections Committee for hearing Assembly Bill 397 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 2019-2020, position vacancies resulted in the largest use of overtime, accounting for over 1 million hours. This cost the taxpayers over \$31.3 million. And that number is growing every year. Last session when I testified on this bill, that number was \$25.5 million.

Further, the vacancy rate across institutions in 2021 climbed to 15.6%, up from 13.3% in 2018. Vacancies are highest in maximum security institutions with Waupun Correctional Institution experiencing nearly 42% vacancy among its officer and sergeant positions. This threatens the safety of both the guards and the inmates.

AB 397 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 AB 397. I urge you to pass this common sense bill.

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State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882 • (608) 266-1832 • Toll-free (866) 615-7510
Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wi.gov • SenatorWanggaard.com