



# Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

## Testimony on Senate Bill 399

September 29, 2021

Thank you Chairman Stroebel and committee members for hearing Senate Bill 399 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.

SB 399 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 399. I urge you to pass this common sense bill.

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

# JESSE JAMES

Thank you Chairman Stroebel and members of the committee,

As a law enforcement officer, I took it to heart when I found out about the significant number of vacancies riddled throughout correctional institutions throughout our state. There is an average vacancy rate of just over 15% throughout our state correctional institutions. In my district, the Stanley Correctional Institution and it has a vacancy rate of just over 12%. This cannot continue, our correctional facilities need to be fully staffed, and this bill would help address this issue.

Senate Bill 399 removes the current prohibition on the use of billboards to post job openings for state correctional institutions. This vacancy rate costed the Wisconsin taxpayer \$60,000,000 in fiscal year 2020 for overtime costs and pay. The use of billboards is an attempt to remedy this issue. Billboards are an inexpensive way to attract more applicants and reduce overtime costs.

Senate Bill 399 is a simple piece of legislation to help get people to work and to staff our correctional facilities. A fully staffed correctional facility ensures that all staff are safe while also protecting inmates. I have heard the tragic stories of fatigue and violence from our corrections staff throughout this state simply because there is no one to take the next shift. An NBC 26 article called the Green Bay Correctional Institution stated that this institution is the most dangerous place to work in Wisconsin. They have a vacancy rate of 10.3%. At the Columbia Correctional Institution there was an attack on a prison guard in January. They have a vacancy rate of 29.2%. A fully staffed correctional facility would be able to curb this issue providing inmates with less opportunities to perpetuate violence.

I would like to thank Senator Wanggaard and Representatives Callahan, Bowen, Snyder, and Schraa for working closely with me on this common sense legislation to fully staff our state correctional institutions.