



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN

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To: Joint Committee on Finance

Re: Statement on 2007-2009 State Budget – Corrections and Juvenile Justice

Since the passage of Truth In Sentencing legislation, the League has expressed grave concern about this state's move to base public safety policy on increased prison sentencing while virtually ignoring rehabilitation and community corrections. This budget presents the sobering truth that since fiscal 1997-98 adult prison costs in Wisconsin have increased 83 percent.

The second largest General Purpose Revenue (GPR) increase over base in this 2007-09 budget is Corrections—topped only by School Aids. Indeed, the projected population in prison facilities continues to increase. It is disappointing that our concern has been justified.

We certainly support the few rehabilitative initiatives in this almost billion-dollar Corrections budget, but it is still insufficient compared to the costs of incarceration.

Two proposals in the budget do receive our strong support. The establishment of a Truth In Sentencing Phase II Commission to propose legislation for sentencing guidelines is long overdue and is needed to eliminate the piece-meal legislation that has occurred.

The most promising budget proposal is the establishment of a Criminal Justice Research Office to review and analyze information on the cost effectiveness of criminal sentencing, incarceration and offender rehabilitation programs. We believe this much needed initiative will begin a transition to a more thoughtful, factual and productive corrections policy.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

The League supports the increase in Youth Aids funds paid to counties for juvenile delinquency related services.

We are disappointed to see a continued decrease in the number of positions for professionals who work with youth in recreational, work and educational services.

The League supports returning 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system, a measure that is not addressed in the Governor's budget. Were this to happen there would need to be an increase in the budget for services to this age group.