



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Corrections

FROM: Barbara Sella, Associate Director

DATE: January 18, 2022

RE: AB 815, TAD Grants for Mental Health Treatment

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops, urges you to support Assembly Bill 815, which would allow Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) grants to be used for the treatment of mental health conditions.

In 2004, the WCC testified in support of the original TAD bill, noting that it called for “a profound change in our correctional system.” Our position was based on the 1999 findings of a WCC Task Force on Corrections, which issued *Public Safety, the Common Good, and the Church: A Statement on Crime and Punishment in Wisconsin* and called for rethinking our state’s correctional system. In their statement, the bishops posed the question, “is a policy of allocating so many resources to locking people up without reforming them good stewardship which furthers the common good?”

Already in 1999, the bishops recognized that many of the incarcerated suffered from mental health issues. Today it is widely recognized that unresolved trauma is often at the root of mental health deterioration and delinquency. Just as our educational system is focusing more on the mental health of students, so too our criminal justice system must address the mental health needs of offenders.

According to an April 2021 report from Wisconsin’s Division of Adult Institutions, 92 percent of incarcerated women and 40 percent of men have a mental health condition.¹ Among women, 38 percent have been diagnosed with such serious conditions as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorder, and severe depression. Among men, the number drops to 7 percent. Incarceration is rarely able to address these conditions and often exacerbates them, whereas treatment courts provide intensive programs to help participants heal.

Treatment courts have been shown to reduce recidivism. In 2020, the State of Wisconsin Criminal Justice Coordinating Council TAD Program demonstrated that participants who

¹ State of Wisconsin, Department of Corrections, Division of Adult Institutions, “Corrections at a Glance (November 2021)” <https://doc.wi.gov/DataResearch/DataAndReports/DAIAtAGlance.pdf>

graduate from treatment courts recidivate at significantly lower rates than those who receive no treatment.²

Treatment courts also save taxpayer money. The same 2020 TAD program report noted that “the Wisconsin criminal justice system receives a benefit of \$4.17 for every \$1 in state TAD funding spent on treatment courts.”³

While untreated mental health and substance use place individuals at far greater risk of committing crimes, we know that there is hope for those who choose to accept treatment. At the same time, society has a responsibility to see that effective treatment is properly funded for those most in need.

It seems appropriate to close this testimony in the same way we did in 2004.

Reconciliation and restoration are not possible unless those rightly convicted of crimes accept the responsibility for what they have done and acknowledge that their crimes had consequences for others. Neither is restoration possible if law abiding citizens cannot set aside their pain and righteousness in favor of making the community whole again.

AB 815 helps make offenders and the community whole again. We commend the authors for their bill and we strongly urge you to support it.

Thank you.

² Wisconsin Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis, “Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) Program 2014-2018 Participant Outcome Summary and Cost-Benefit Report,” p. 52. https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/mandatedreports/2020/departement_of_justice/treatment_diversion_tad_participant_outcome_summary_s_165_95_5p_b_received_3_5_2020

³ Ibid, p. 3.