



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Van Wanggaard, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: December 17, 2025

RE: Senate Bill 577, Compensating Innocent Persons After Wrongful Imprisonment

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, strongly supports Senate Bill 577, which speeds up the process of applying for state compensation for people who have been wrongly imprisoned, increases the amount of their state compensation, makes the compensation exempt from state taxes, and provides them with health care coverage and transition services. We applaud the bill's authors for their bipartisan effort to make our criminal justice system more just.

The bill accords well with the principles articulated by Wisconsin's Catholic bishops in their statement, [*Public Safety, the Common Good, and the Church: A Statement on Crime and Punishment in Wisconsin*](#), namely respect for the human person, common good, concern for individuals experiencing poverty and marginalization, restoration, and solidarity.

People who have been wrongly imprisoned have lost years of their lives that can never be returned to them. They deserve to be compensated so they can rebuild their lives, care for their loved ones, and fully participate in their communities. The current yearly compensation cap is \$25,000. This bill would increase it to \$50,000 and adjust it annually for inflation, not to exceed a total award of \$1,000,000.

Wisconsin has a responsibility to stand in solidarity with these innocent individuals, as well as their surviving family members, not just for their sake, but also for the sake of the common good. When the state acknowledges its error and attempts to make amends, it restores public trust and legitimacy.

Senate Bill 577 recognizes that restoration of the exonerated should start immediately, through the provision of transition-to-release services. It provides the opportunity to elect health care coverage for up to five years, which is essential as those who are wrongfully convicted often experience serious trauma and need time to rebuild their lives.

We respectfully urge you to support this important and necessary bill.