

## Shifting to a Restorative Model

by Rep. Dave Considine (D-Baraboo)



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Over the past twenty years, Wisconsin's prison population has grown twenty percent<sup>1</sup>. This growing prison population puts a strain on our budget and the people of Wisconsin. Instead of heavily funding prisons we need to fund restorative programs like the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) program. Wisconsin's TAD program allows District Attorneys or judges to offer offenders the opportunity to enter into voluntary substance abuse treatment, case management, or another risk reduction program as a safe alternative to jail or prison. TAD was implemented in 2005 in Wisconsin and has had a positive impact on many lives. As a member of the Committee on Mental Health, I recognize the trauma that many offenders have faced in their life that led them down the wrong path. I commend Governor Evers' proposed investment in TAD so we can continue to move towards a restorative criminal justice system.

Governor Evers' proposed 2021-23 Biennial Budget makes a significant investment in the TAD program by more than doubling the TAD funding level over the biennium. This additional funding of \$15 million would greatly expand the program and allow programs such as veteran's courts, mental health courts, and other diversion programs to be funded through the TAD program. Governor Evers also recommends making statutory language changes related to the TAD program to improve administration, encourage adoption of programs, expand eligibility, and increase the types of programs.

According to a Wisconsin DOJ Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis report, our criminal justice system saves \$4.17 and \$8.68 for every dollar in TAD funding spent on diversion programs. TAD programs are a win-win. They are evidence based programs that save the state money, improve lives, reduce recidivism, make communities safer by holding violent offenders accountable, and reduce disparities. As a state, we need to focus on funding people over prisons.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-wisconsin.pdf>.