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State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections

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Dear WPPA Member:

I would like to take this opportunity to provide members of the Wisconsin Professional Police Association with further details about the corrections and public safety enhancements that are contained in the 2009-11 budget that Governor Doyle introduced on February 17, 2009.

As you know, Governor Doyle is a former Attorney General and District Attorney. He has dedicated much of his career to making Wisconsin a good – and safe – place to live, work and raise a family. My criminal justice background spans more than a quarter-century. I am a former street cop, four-term Sheriff and state and federal prosecutor. I share the Governor's strong commitment to keeping Wisconsin safe. We do not – and never will – support a policy that sacrifices safety for savings.

There always will be a need for prisons. We know violent criminals need to stay in prison. But we also know that 97 percent of inmates will one day complete their prison term and return to the community. Make no mistake – they are coming back some day. And they can come back either rehabilitated and prepared to lead productive lives, or they can come back angry, unprepared, and more likely to cycle back into a pattern of criminal behavior, re-victimization, and re-incarceration. The latter scenario is not safe for communities, not effective for criminal justice, and not good for the taxpayer.

We need a criminal justice and corrections system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes, encourages positive changes in prison, offers the chance for nonviolent offenders to be productive in Wisconsin communities, and focuses resources on more serious offenders who pose a greater risk to the safety of our communities.

Governor Doyle's 2009-11 budget moves us along a path of smart corrections reform that began when he took office in 2003. Under the last three budget cycles, we have increased the resources devoted to alcohol and drug treatment, dramatically expanded treatment options both in prison and in the community, and made more tools available to courts and our agents to hold offenders accountable.

One such initiative is the Earned Release Program, which was created in 2004 to allow courts to make certain non-violent inmates eligible for an early prison release if they complete a rigorous alcohol and drug treatment program. The Governor's 2007-09 budget expanded the Earned Release Program dramatically in an effort to help meet judicial demand. The 2009-11 budget takes the Earned Release concept to a new level by allowing us to develop new tracks within existing rehabilitation programs to address inmates' primary needs, even if those needs are not completely related to substance abuse but reach into other critical areas, such as education or employment.

The budget contains other important measures that we believe will provide inmates with new incentives to develop patterns of positive behavior, along with strong consequences if they fail to do so. As many of you may be aware, these reforms are not happening in a vacuum. Wisconsin is one of more than 40 U.S. states that are making reforms to address sentencing disparities, to find safe alternatives to prison as a sanction, to advance evidence-based practices, and to deal with other challenges facing corrections and criminal justice in the 21st century.

Along the way, we are keeping victims' rights first and foremost. Victims will still have opportunities to be notified of changes in an offender's status, and to provide input into decisions regarding

early release before the decisions are made. And we will continue to hold offenders accountable to ensure restitution is repaid to victims before an offender is granted an early discharge from supervision.

Ultimately, we believe the innovations we make here will serve as a national model of what works in corrections. Consider:

- Under the Positive Adjustment Time program, certain inmates will have an opportunity to build a pattern of positive behavior in prison, which will earn them the ability to petition a review commission for an early release into extended supervision. For context, these inmates already have the right to petition courts for sentence adjustments under existing Truth in Sentencing laws, regardless of prior behavior. But Positive Adjustment Time encourages inmates to do more than follow the rules; it also encourages them to seek out opportunities to complete treatment, to complete education, and to develop work skills, all of which help them build a foundation for success upon their eventual return to the community.
- The budget also renames the Parole Commission and broadens its duties. By taking these steps, we can increase efficiency, improve uniformity of review standards, and ease workload burdens in the court system.
- Governor Doyle's budget also makes reforms to our probation and parole system. Our agents have been supervising low-risk, non-assaultive misdemeanants when they could be spending more time supervising higher-risk offenders. By having certain misdemeanor offenses handled not through probation but instead through fines, jail time or other locally based sanctions, our agents can focus their supervision on those who need it the most.
- The budget includes new measures to release certain inmates who don't pose a threat to public safety – those who are terminally ill, infirmed or who have other conditions that make them virtually no risk. By moving these inmates into the community where they can still be supervised by our agents, we can free up space to securely house inmates who need to be in prison.

Let me be clear: We are not opening the back door of our prison. There is no mass exit on the horizon. In Wisconsin, we can do better. The strategies included in Governor Doyle's 2009-11 budget will pay dividends in the long run with fewer new crimes, fewer new victims and stronger Wisconsin families and communities.

Over the past several weeks I have discussed these policies in communities across Wisconsin, and I would be happy to talk with you in more depth about them. Please don't hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or would like to know more about why the reforms in Governor Doyle's budget are the right thing for effective criminal justice, the right thing for taxpayers and the right thing to prevent crime and keep Wisconsin safe.

Sincerely,



Rick Raemisch
Secretary