

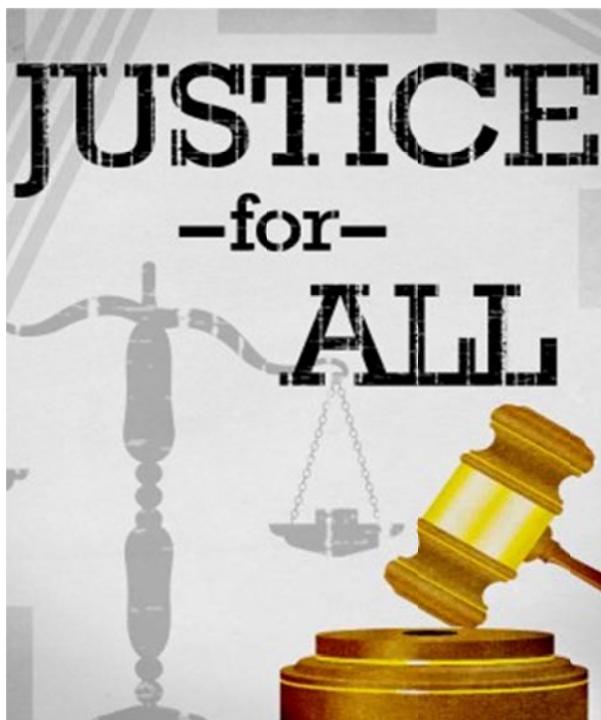
Public Education and Outreach Effort in La Crosse County, WI

La Crosse County held a town hall on their criminal justice practices and jail transition with the Sheriff and a judge as panelists. The town hall happened in one of the new direct supervision units in the jail, not yet populated with inmates, and was broadcast on WXOW-TV 19 and written up in the La Cross Tribune newspaper. The Tribune also wrote a series of article ranging from electronic monitoring to the jail, which are included below, on the county's criminal justice system prior to the event.

Justice for all Part 1: Inside the system

http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/article_d75d82bc-4230-11e0-88db-001cc4c03286.html

By ANNE JUNGEN | ajungen@lacrossetribune.com | lacrossetribune.com | Posted: Sunday, February 27, 2011 12:00 am | [\(20\) Comments](#)



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A look at the justice system in La Crosse County.

[The series](#)

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their name, address and phone number to chardie@lacrossetribune.com or call (608) 791-8223 to register by 5 p.m. Tuesday. Participants will meet at 5 p.m. Thursday in the lobby of the La Crosse County Law Enforcement Center, 333 Vine St.

Be sure to read the Tribune and watch WXOW-TV today through Friday as we explore different parts of the county's criminal justice system.

Coming up

SUNDAY: Introduction to Thursday's town hall

MONDAY: The jail

TUESDAY: Electronic monitoring

WEDNESDAY: Treatment courts

THURSDAY: Probation

FRIDAY: Town hall coverage

Sometimes the best way to protect the community from crime is to rehabilitate those who are committing it, criminal justice leaders argue.

"There are some who believe anything other than jail is soft on crime. We need to change that perspective," La Crosse County Criminal Justice Management Council member Mike Desmond said. "There are alternatives to jail that are very effective if the goal is to change someone's behavior."

The Tribune, WXOW-TV and the La Crosse County Criminal Justice Management Council are sponsoring a "Justice for All" town hall meeting 7 to 8 p.m. Thursday inside the new expansion of the La Crosse County Jail.

WXOW-TV will broadcast the event live.

The town hall aims to educate the community on the county's criminal justice system and why programs - such as Justice Sanctions, treatment courts and electronic monitoring - are being used locally, council member Keith Belzer said.

"We want the community to be informed," said council member Troy Harcey. "This gives them the opportunity to have an exchange with prominent members of the criminal justice community."

La Crosse County has received state and national recognition for its approach to dealing with offenders and crime, Harcey said.

"I believe La Crosse is effective on crime," he said.

Organizers also hope the public can learn more about the mission of the council, a 20-member group charged with leading the county's criminal justice philosophy.

"I think many people have a misunderstanding of what occurs in the criminal justice system," Belzer said.

TO HEAR MORE: A presentation is available to groups interested in hearing more about the Criminal Justice Management Council. Call Keith Belzer at (608) 784-8055 for more information.

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Part 2: Jail addition improves conditions but county officials say alternative programs needed

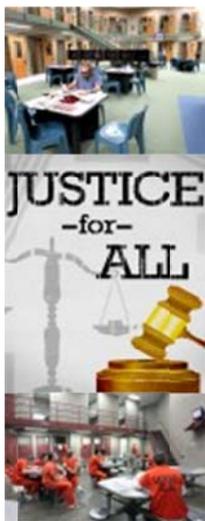
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The cell block in the new addition of the La Crosse County Jail. Erik Daily



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La Crosse County Jail inmate Joe Johnson describes the older blocks as depressing and almost claustrophobic. "I know I still have calluses on my butt from sitting on the stainless steel tables," he said. Johnson, 46, was the first inmate last year to move from the existing facility into the expansion.

"I didn't know what to think," he said. "It was so wonderful."

In here, there is freedom to roam and space to escape tension. There is privacy. There is an unexpected calm.

"People strive to be on their toes so they don't have to leave this part," Johnson said.

With its two impressive pods and a new way of supervising inmates, the expansion in June opened to inmates just 13 years after a new jail debuted in downtown La Crosse.

Even with room for 172, an expanding jail population forced the county board into considering an addition within months.

It was a crisis the board predicted when it failed on its promise to invest in jail alternatives.

"It was not a problem created by the sheriff, it was a problem created by the county board," La Crosse County Board Chairman Steve Doyle said.

Bad decisions

Build in 1965 with a capacity of 68, the old jail in what is now the County Administrative Center on Fourth Street was overcrowded. Inmates walked hallways with the public to courtrooms.

"It was a security issue waiting to blow up," Doyle said.

The board in the early 1990s concluded an addition to the building's south end would be too expensive and couldn't deliver the capacity needed.

Consultants recommended a three-story jail in a new building that promised better security. Experts also suggested the county board start exploring programming like electronic monitoring in the community and home detention, then seen as progressive jail alternatives.

The proposed new building could fit 400 inmates for \$30 million.

"We had sticker shock and said, 'We can't do that,'" Doyle said.

The board agreed to invest in alternative programming. In exchange, then-sheriff Karl Halverson agreed to a one-story jail.

But a board reluctant to fund staff to run new programs didn't hold up its end of the bargain, Doyle said.

"It was extremely frustrating because I felt the county board was renegeing on a promise we had made to the sheriff," he said. "We didn't follow through."

The new \$21 million facility with 172 jail beds opened in October 1997.

It was full within months.

"We even saw it on the horizon before the doors were even open because the county board had made the promise that we were going to do these programs, and they weren't in place because they kept getting voted out of the budget," Doyle said.

At times, there were 16 inmates sleeping on the floor, Sheriff Steve Helgeson said.

"That was a serious problem," he said.

A spike in inmate suicide attempts and completed suicides - 4 between December 1997 and April 2006 - plus a lack of programming space and a place the house female inmates also plagued the existing facility, Helgeson said.

"The fights between the inmates and the assaults on staff, as well as the suicides and the overcrowding, I think people realized what we were doing was very dangerous," he said. "We were going to end up paying either through lawsuits or trying to make it safer."

Building for the future

Consultants told the county to build an addition with more beds and programming space. And this time, they said, plan for the future. The new building must also include room for female inmates, who were still housed in the old inadequate facility.

"It was a federal lawsuit waiting to happen," Doyle said.

Board members elected after the jail was built were more willing to invest in programming, Doyle said. The county's circuit court judges threw their support behind treatment courts.

"All of the judges eventually came to the conclusion that we weren't giving them enough options," Doyle said. "And until we were willing to do that, they were going to have to keep filling up our jail."

The board unanimously approved the addition in 2008 after a decade of discussion.

The 146,000-square-foot expansion nearly doubled the building at 333 Vine St. and consolidated other branches of the county's criminal justice system under one roof.

The two 6,200-square-foot pods reserved for 114 inmates are considerably different from the nine blocks in the existing facility.

In that old part, most blocks are dim with unpainted concrete walls and floors, though carpet is an upgrade in the pods that house female inmates.

Inmates pass time at steel tables with newspapers, games and television. The block's alpha male decides what they watch.

Other more restless inmates pace in day rooms under the glow of harsh florescent lights. They're banned from their cells until mid-afternoon to discourage them from wasting the day asleep.

Staff can monitor them through two-way mirrors and from a central command post but inmates cannot see out of their dingy temporary home.

It is, without a doubt, a tough place to live.

In the two new two-tiered pods, natural light filters through large skylights in the tall white ceilings. Carpet adsorbs sound and contributes to a quieter environment.

Inmates' accessibility to their cells, games, a recreation room and flat panel televisions that on a recent morning were turned to "The Price is Right" and "The Cosby Show" are obvious privileges.

Life is better in here, Johnson said, "but it's still jail."

The addition also reflects a change in correctional philosophy that places a jailer inside the new pods for direct supervision.

"It's been very successful. I would say its probably performed better than we hoped it would because we're have such few problems with inmates in there," the sheriff said.

The new pods are reserved for the jail's better-behaved inmates. Their existence is an incentive to behave.

"It does teach them something about being responsible and being accountable," jail Capt. Doris Daggett said. "If you follow the rules in the jail, if you do what you're supposed to do, there's a reward for that. Hopefully that will carry out into the community."

The building's design can accommodate two more floors if needed, but the county will continue to explore programming and jail alternatives designed to reduce recidivism, Doyle said.

Jail and community programs helped reduce the jail's average population from 199 in 2006 to 173 last year.

Programs

Restless inmates can become problem inmates so the addition includes room for the jail's 27 programs that equip them with the skills to survive once released.

"Festival Foods has the boomerang theory. We have the anti-boomerang theory. We don't want them back," Doyle said. "We want to figure out a way to keep them from going through that revolving door."

Programs including educational, exercise and health classes, alcoholics and narcotics anonymous, behavioral rewards, Bible study are available to the jail population.

"They're here, they might as well do something to better themselves for when they're released back into the community," Helgeson said. "If we can do something to lessen the chance of them returning, that's what we're trying to accomplish."

It's too early to determine whether the programming has reduced recidivism, Helgeson said.

"But we're headed in the right direction," he said.

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Justice For All Part 3: Electronic monitoring cheaper alternative to incarceration

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By [Chris Hubbuch / chubbuch@lacrossetribune.com](#) lacrossetribune.com | Posted: Tuesday, March 1, 2011 12:15 am | [\(12\) Comments](#)



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Full Story

About 10 years ago, Judge Dennis Montabon began pushing La Crosse County to close its aging work-release jail and monitor inmates electronically in their homes. County board Chairman Steve Doyle sums up his argument: If we trust people to be out all day, why are we paying to provide them a bed and meals?

At its heart was the notion that it’s neither economically feasible nor effective to lock up everyone who breaks the law.

Most criminals are not a threat to public safety, at least so long as they’re sober, and the tools to monitor their behavior in the community are far less expensive than the cost to jail them. What’s more, evidence shows the majority of criminals are less likely to commit new crimes if they get treatment in the community, and, for a few, jail actually can make them worse.

The county finally eliminated the Huber work-release center in 2004, putting those low-risk offenders into a program called Justice Sanctions, which employs a variety of tools to monitor offenders serving sentences or on bond.

Some wear ankle bracelets that send a radio signal to a device plugged into a phone line to alert an agent if the offender isn’t home when she’s supposed to be. Higher-risk offenders might get a GPS bracelet that tracks their movements. Agents get daily reports showing where the offenders have been.

Offenders can be ordered to provide a daily urine sample for drug testing or blow into a breathalyzer to see if they’ve been drinking. Those accused of drunken driving might get a take-home breathalyzer that plugs into a phone line and records both a breath sample and a photograph to make sure they aren’t cheating.

Electronic monitoring allows people to maintain jobs, family connections, the “pro-social” things that will help them become productive, law-abiding citizens, said Circuit Judge Elliott Levine, who adds, “it’s a hell of a lot cheaper than jail.”

On average, Justice Sanctions monitoring costs the county about \$21 a day per offender. Jail costs \$96.

Offenders are expected to pay \$6 a day for bond monitoring, \$11 if they’re serving a sentence. The county collects about 30 percent of what’s billed.

In the six years since the county closed the Huber center, the average jail population has dropped 30 percent, to 172 inmates, while Justice Sanctions now monitors 234 offenders.

Justice Sanctions in 2010 had a budget of \$1.6 million, of which about \$400,000 was offset by revenues. The jail budget was \$6.3 million.

Punish or rehabilitate? Legally, a sentence of electronic monitoring is the same as jail, though to victims and the general public they’re not the same, District Attorney Tim Gruenke said. “Jail carries more stigma.”

That brings up a question that Keith Belzer, a defense attorney and member of the Criminal Justice Management Council, likes to ask: How many people want to see criminals punished and how many want to see them change their behavior?

Put another way, Belzer said we should differentiate between people we are afraid of and those we’re mad at. Lock up the ones we fear, but don’t waste money punishing the ones we’re simply mad at.

We can put people in jail to punish them, but evidence shows it doesn’t change their behavior, Belzer said. “We keep locking people up, and they keep committing the same crimes.”

Evidence shows that unless punishment is swift and certain — which isn’t necessarily compatible with the U.S. Constitution — it does not deter crime. And punishment does not reduce recidivism.

What has been shown to work, Justice Sanctions manager Jane Klekamp said, is a set of principles that emphasize providing support in the community, positive reinforcement and internal motivation.

“We’re not saying you shouldn’t punish the person,” Klekamp said. “We’re saying this is what the research says.”

Gruenke points out that few of those sent to jail — on sentences of less than a year — are truly dangerous; those who are belong in prison.

“We can’t put everyone in jail or prison,” Circuit Judge Scott Horne said. “So we consider the gravity of the offense and the risk to the community.”

A new toolJustice Sanctions was created in the mid-1990s, when, faced with the prospect of building a 400-bed jail at a cost of more than \$30 million, La Crosse County balked. The county board agreed to build a smaller, cheaper jail and bolster it with alternative programs.

But the board failed to deliver on funding for staff and programming, and the new 172-bed jail was full within months of opening, which led in part to a recently completed expansion to make room for up to 273 inmates.

The problem also led to the formation in 2000 of a Criminal Justice Management Council. Comprised of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, police, victim services representatives as well as mental and chemical health professionals and general community members, the council researched correctional alternatives with a mind to both lower the jail population and find more effective ways to reduce crime.

Justice Sanctions at first primarily monitored those serving sentences, but judges have turned to it as a tool for monitoring people on bond while awaiting trial.

On an average day in 2007, the program had about 90 offenders serving sentences, and about 96 on bond. Last year, the number serving sentences had dropped to about 54 a day, while those on bond had ballooned to 139.

Judges say it just makes sense to monitor those on bond, even if they haven’t been convicted.

Judges in the past would let a defendant out on a bond with a condition of no drinking, but unless the defendant was caught in a bar they might never know about violations. Now, defendants can be subject to twice-a-day alcohol tests — even more frequent if necessary.

In addition, judges say, monitoring allows them to know at sentencing if someone is able to behave in the community or needs to sit in jail.

“With most drunken drivers, if they are sober, they’re fine people,” Horne said. “When drinking, they’re extremely dangerous. This way we can put them in the community and monitor them closely ... Previously, unless they committed a new crime, we’d never know.”

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Justice For All Part 4: Treatment courts aim to close revolving door

[Justice For All Part 4: Treatment courts aim to close revolving door](#)

By [Chris Hubbuch / chubbuch@lacrossetribune.com](#) | lacrossetribune.com | Posted: Wednesday, March 2, 2011 12:10 am | [\(14\) Comments](#)



[Buy this photo](#) Tammy Stussy graduated from La Crosse County OWI court in March of 2009.
PETER THOMSON photo

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Rob Penfield was what most would consider a career criminal when he was arrested in 2004 at the Maple Grove Motel. At 36, he'd spent as much of his adult life in jail as out. He'd been on probation almost continually since his first felony conviction, at age 17.

He'd forged checks and stolen cars, bikes, lawn mowers. He took anything that wasn't bolted down, and a lot of things that were.

He wasn't proud of these crimes. Many years later he's still ashamed.

He was also a textbook addict, who did whatever it took to feed his raging meth habit. And it took a lot. By the time of his last arrest, when police intercepted a package of drugs he'd ordered from Arizona, Penfield was shooting more than three eight balls — \$1,200 worth of home-cooked amphetamines — into his arm every day.

Judge John Perlich made him an offer: spend 18½ years in prison or complete a program called drug court.

Penfield, who says he planned his life in minutes and never expected to see 40, was confident he could survive in prison but wanted to be something before his parents died.

He'd been through treatment before — during a five-month stint in a boot-camp prison alternative — and through periods of "white knuckle" sobriety, when he tried quitting without the tools of a recovery program.

He checked into a residential treatment center, began going to 12-step meetings. He got a job. Once a day, sometimes more, he peed in a cup while someone watched, just to make sure he wasn't using.

And every week, he went to Perlich's courtroom, where his progress was monitored.

An alternative to prison, drug court is a treatment program for nonviolent offenders with underlying chemical addictions who have failed in previous attempts at treatment. Supervision is intensive. Relapses are expected and bring sanctions — a weekend in jail, community service — and more time in the program. Successes like a clean test or a new job are rewarded with immediate praise.

“These people have never been praised by anyone in authority,” said Judge Elliott Levine, who presides over a separate treatment court for repeat drunken drivers. “They're often surprised when they find the system is no longer fighting them.”

Overseeing each case is a team comprised of a prosecutor, defense attorney, probation agent, treatment specialist and judge. Judges say they find themselves learning new ways of thinking — instead of just interpreting the law and handing out punishments, they are forced to understand addiction, psychology and motivation.

“Nothing we do as judges is more important than sentencing,” said Judge Dale Pasell, who took over drug court in 2006. “We need to bring to bear all the information, knowledge and judgment we can. If that requires me to change my approach so they're not as likely to commit crimes, that's a good thing.”

Participants pass through three phases. The first lasts at least 90 days, and the leash is short. As they earn trust, they get more freedom. Like a game of Chutes and Ladders, participants who screw up can be sent back to square one.

“This is going to be the hardest thing you ever did,” Perlich would tell candidates. “It might be easier to do the (time) in prison.”

Ending the cycle

The first drug court was started in Florida in 1989, as cocaine addicts had begun to clog the justice system. La Crosse County launched a pilot drug court in 2001 after Perlich had grown tired of seeing the same offenders cycling through his courtroom.

In those days, judges doled out punishment.

“That was the only thing you could do,” Perlich said. “What we've learned is that punishing people for bad behavior doesn't change that behavior. ... We've got to be doing something better.”

Perlich, who retired in 2006, does not like to be mistaken for a “fuzzy-headed liberal.”

In fact, his reputation for handing down stiff sentences was such that defense attorney Keith Belzer kept a template form to request a judicial substitution whenever one of his clients landed in Perlich's courtroom.

But the research showed that drug courts were effective.

Nationwide, about 75 percent of treatment court graduates remain arrest-free in the two years after the program, according to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. By comparison, only about 30 percent of those released from prison stay out of trouble.

“The research is overwhelming,” Perlich said. “Every bit shows that drug courts work. And it’s cheaper — that’s the critical part — it’s cheaper than prison, jail, anything else we’ve ever tried.”

The successes aren't just numbers.

Judges who preside over treatment courts tell stories of lives saved, families reunited. Perlich still gets a Christmas card every year from one woman who reminds him how long she's been clean.

“Like most judges, I don't see the success stories,” Pasell said.

OWI court

Based on the success of drug court, La Crosse County added an OWI court in 2006, which uses a similar model — close supervision, mandated treatment, and the threat of sanctions — with repeat drunken drivers.

That program has shown some initial signs of success. In the first three years, fewer than 4 percent of graduates were re-arrested for drunken driving. In addition, after years of climbing steadily, OWI arrests in La Crosse County dropped in the years since the OWI court was established, bucking a statewide trend.

OWI court has its share of success stories, like Tammy Stussy, who was driving to a friend's house in January 2008 when she was stopped for speeding in Onalaska. She had vodka and Mountain Dew in her cup holder and a 0.269 percent blood alcohol concentration. It was her third drunken driving arrest, which at the time meant up to a year in the county jail.

Stussy, 45, pleaded guilty and entered the OWI court, which she now says saved her life.

Before her arrest, she had lost her job and retreated to her room, drinking vodka with the shades drawn. In the morning, her hands shook so badly she needed a drink just to put on mascara.

Daily testing while out on bond had forced her to stop drinking, but OWI court — which required her to attend 12-step meetings and to check in once a week with the judge — gave her

the structure and lengthy sobriety she says she needed to reach an awakening, a realization that she could choose never to drink again.

“The noose was so tight,” she said. “I needed that.”

Not everyone succeeds. Ian Lutz, a 23-year-old La Crosse resident who entered drug court after a burglary charge, absconded and was on the lam when arrested in October on suspicion of selling heroin to a man who died of an overdose. Lutz was charged with reckless homicide and is awaiting sentencing on the burglary conviction.

Part of the challenge for the court is to find the right candidates, the medium-risk offenders who have failed to clean themselves up through traditional treatment, probation and jail. Most low-level criminals tend to self-correct, and can actually get worse in a program like drug court; the highest-risk offenders are too resistant to treatment.

“There’s no guarantees,” Pasell said. “There’s failures with what we did before, too. People who went to prison and committed more crimes.”

Rebuilding a life

After two decades of drug abuse and trouble with the law, Rob Penfield entered drug court assuming he’d fail, even if meth had long since stopped being fun for him.

“I messed up every good thing that ever happened to me,” he said.

For Penfield, who started smoking pot in his early teens, drug court provided not only an incentive to stay sober but a structure to begin rebuilding a life.

He got rid of his old friends — really just acquaintances with a shared interest in getting high, he said. He met a woman, though he says he kept her at arm’s length for years, having seen too many people “get sucked under the bus.”

He passed more than 320 drug and alcohol tests, amassing 526 days of sobriety before he graduated from the program in October 2005. Somewhere along the way he realized he was staying clean for himself, not because the court required it.

Eventually he transferred from the laundry room at Gundersen-Lutheran to Unity House, the same treatment center where he’d lived when first getting sober. He and his girlfriend bought a house in Onalaska. He enrolled at Viterbo University, where he’s working toward a degree in addiction studies.

His parents even came to visit, and his father got to see him sober before he died.

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Justice For All Part 5: Probation viewed as adequate way to supervise offenders

By [ANNE JUNGEN / \[ajungen@lacrossetribune.com\]\(mailto:ajungen@lacrossetribune.com\)](#) lacrossetribune.com | Posted: Thursday, March 3, 2011 12:00 am | [\(3\) Comments](#)

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A look at the justice system in La Crosse County.

[Walker: Probationers should serve full sentence](#)

Gov. Scott Walker wants to end a policy that lets offenders off probation early.

He included the proposal as part of the budget he presented Tuesday.

“Gov. Walker believes when a criminal is sentenced, the sentence should be served out. Period,” Walker’s spokesman Cullen Werwie said.

The law now requires that probation agents consider releasing offenders halfway through their sentences.

Agents may recommend early release if the offender has paid restitution, poses no risk to the community and is working toward rehabilitation, holding a job and avoided violations, La Crosse probation supervisor Bill Hammes said.

Several state Department of Corrections employees review the case before early release is granted.

“It’s a very formal process reviewed multiple times,” Hammes said.

On average, one person is released early each month, Hammes said.

Walker is open to alternative sentencing and community based programs but believes offenders in p

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Gov. Scott Walker wants to end a policy that lets offenders off probation early.

He included the proposal as part of the budget he presented Tuesday.

“Gov. Walker believes when a criminal is sentenced, the sentence should be served out. Period,” Walker’s spokesman Cullen Werwie said.

The law now requires that probation agents consider releasing offenders halfway through their sentences.

Agents may recommend early release if the offender has paid restitution, poses no risk to the community and is working toward rehabilitation, holding a job and avoided violations, La Crosse probation supervisor Bill Hammes said.

Several state Department of Corrections employees review the case before early release is granted.

“It’s a very formal process reviewed multiple times,” Hammes said.

On average, one person is released early each month, Hammes said.

Walker is open to alternative sentencing and community based programs but believes offenders in p

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Mica Luhm's behavior on probation was just as rebellious as what led her to it. Luhm was an immature 21-year-old when she ran from police on Halloween in 2006 to escape arrest on four misdemeanor warrants. Officers later found her hiding in a basement closet of her boyfriend's Holmen home.

"They pulled me out, and I started fighting," she said. "I was out partying, and I did not want to get arrested."

She swore, swung and kicked until they stopped her with a Taser.

Luhm pleaded guilty to assaulting a police officer, a felony, and was sentenced to nine months in jail, plus three-years on probation.

"Probation is a constant reminder of the need to grow up," she said.

Critics argue a probation sentence minimizes the crime, while proponents contend it is an effective way to monitor low-risk offenders with stringent conditions designed to correct criminal behavior and reduce recidivism.

"There are a lot of folks who may get into trouble where you can, with good supervision, keep them in the community," La Crosse probation supervisor Bill Hammes said.

Judges place offenders on probation at the end of the criminal case proceedings.

Under state law, judges must first consider placing defendants on probation before imposing a jail or prison sentence. Community supervision may be the best option for offenders who don't pose a risk to the community and who can benefit from treatment programs, La Crosse County Circuit Judge Scott Horne said.

"We have to consider whether their needs can be met by placing them on probation," he said. "Probation allows offenders to address their needs without going to prison."

While less restrictive than a prison sentence, probation poses conditions with which an offender must comply. Conditions range from attending addiction treatment programs to electronic home monitoring to community service.

The conditions offer the structure many offenders so desperately need, probation agent Amanda Kinyon said.

"A lot of them have come from a broken home with no structure at all and they really don't know any better other than to live that way," she said. "With the rules and structure that we give them, it deters them from committing a new crime."

Offenders and probation agents in the first 30 days develop a plan to correct criminal behaviors. Some are required to check in with agents weekly, while others can go up to 90 days without a meeting.

“That’s (the meetings) important because if you don’t keep focused on what the plan is, it’s very easy to not do it,” Hammes said. “I think some of our biggest challenges are to keep our folks focused on completing the program.”

Repeated violations or assaulting and threatening actions will land offenders back in jail and can lead to a probation revocation. Steady communication between agencies means violations are reported quickly.

“If someone is on (probation) for an alcohol-related offense and they have seven months sobriety and they have a slip, we’re probably not going to lock that person up,” Hammes said. “But if it’s the fifth one in four months, they may have to go to jail.”

Violations and new crimes lead agents to initiate the revocation process for about 25 to 30 percent of those on probation, parole and extended supervision in La Crosse County, Hammes said.

Luhm expected to complete her probation “with a snap of my fingers.”

She couldn’t.

Her probation was revoked about seven months before it was set to expire after she was caught drinking — for the 22nd time.

“I wasn’t thinking at all,” she said. “I had a problem.”

A judge ordered her to prison, where she underwent intense alcohol and drug treatment.

“I got out of prison April 27 and to this day, my life has done a complete turn around,” said Luhm, now 26 and living in Holmen.

Today, Luhm is employed, confident, sober and happy — a different person than the woman who once didn’t take supervision seriously.

Luhm said the structure of probation has given her the tools to succeed after her term ends in May. She also credits her successes to a bond with her probation agent.

“She kept me on my toes. She said, ‘You have to knock it off with the crap,’” Luhm said.

Today, 22 agents supervise about 800 offenders on probation in La Crosse County and even more on extended supervision and parole.

Hammes said judges place fewer people on probation now because studies suggests some low-risk offenders can be handled with a fine or electronic monitoring.

Evidence also indicates these offenders may self correct without probation, Horne said.

“Greater contact with the system may increase their risk of recidivism,” he said.

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Justice For All Part 6: Town hall meeting explores community questions about justice system

[Justice For All Part 6: Town hall meeting explores community questions about justice system](#)

[ANNE JUNGEN](#) | ajungen@lacrossetribune.com lacrossetribune.com | Posted: Friday, March 4, 2011 12:05 am | [\(12\) Comments](#)



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• Courtney Houser wanted to face the sheriff and ask what life is like for her fiancé in the La Crosse County Jail. Thomas Harris wanted to know whether younger members of the community could tour the facility to see where they'll land if they break the law.

• On Thursday, they got their answers.

• About 125 community leaders and members of the public filled the new jail expansion for a "Justice for All" town hall meeting to tackle complex issues affecting the jail and county's criminal justice system.

A panel of Sheriff Steve Helgeson and Circuit Judge Dale Pasell could offer only limited explanations as questions from the audience spanned the operations of the jail and justice system and alternative programming.

But the meeting started a community discussion, "and that's what this was all about," said Keith Belzer, event organizer and member of the La Crosse County Criminal Justice Management Council, a town hall co-sponsor. Questions included:

How are mentally ill inmates handled in jail?

About 40 percent of inmates suffer from mental illnesses, and most take medications, Helgeson said. Inmates undergo an extensive survey during booking to identify the condition and are supplied medications and counseling services, said Steve Josephson, the jail's mental health clinician. "My philosophy is to give the inmates what is needed," he said.

Why are there a lot of sex offenders released on probation?

That's a misconception, Pasell said. Judges treat sex offender cases "very seriously" and typically impose lengthy prison sentences, he said. Sex offenders also can be recommitted under the state's sexual predator law.

Who is in jail, how long do they typically stay and why are they here?

Inmates stay for an average of 11 days, Helgeson said. They are in custody on bond or a probation hold or serving a sentence. Circuit Judge Ramona Gonzalez encouraged community members to attend the county's daily 1:30 p.m. criminal intake court to view a portion of the jail population. "Many times it's your neighbors," she said. "And many times it's your neighbors who had an argument with their significant other."

What percentage of inmates are battling substance abuse, and how is it dealt with in the jail?

A "very high" number of inmates are addicted to alcohol and drugs, Helgeson said. "Most of the persons coming into the jail, especially if they are arrested later in the day, are under the influence of alcohol or drugs," he said. Alcohol and narcotics anonymous classes are available to all inmates.

Is the drug treatment court successful?

Pasell called his role in drug court "once of the most satisfying things I've had an opportunity to do as judge." The court allows those struggling with drug addictions to get and follow through with treatment. Participants are held accountable for relapses and rewarded for successes in the heavily scrutinized treatment court. "All the evidence anyone has ever found ... is that we get better outcomes when we put people through something like this," Pasell said.

What happens if an offender violates a condition of Justice Sanctions, a jail-alternative program for low-risk offenders?

Offenders can be prosecuted if they commit a new crime. If they are on bail, a judge can alter conditions depending on the violation, Pasell said. "It's an individualized decision," he said. "Again, we are looking at what we can do to change someone's behavior."

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