

Tony Evers
Governor



State of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Council on Offender Reentry
Meeting Minutes for the Wisconsin Council on Offender Reentry
May 19, 2026 | 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Conducted Remotely via Teams

Council Members Present: Mark Kappes, Andrew Murphy, Jeanne Geraci, Melissa Roberts, Michele Carter, Mike Koenigs, Brenda Rodriguez, Timothy O'Shea, Becky Heth, Ray Woodruff, Justin Kass, Leah Fix, Carl Ashley

Council Members Not Present: Jerome Dillard, Emily Westover, Paul Manriquez, Marlon Skenandore, Keeley Crowley, Yulonda Anderson

Guests:

Minutes:

Cawley Hubner, Department of Corrections

I. Chairperson's Welcome & Approval of Minutes

The Chair, Becky Heth, called to order the quarterly meeting of the Council on Offender Reentry at 2:03 PM on May 19th, 2026.

Becky introduced two new members to the Council

1. Tim O'Shea, Assistant Attorney General
 - a. *Attorney General Representative*
2. Melissa Roberts, Chair, Parole Commission
 - a. *Parole Commission Representative*

The Council welcomed the two new members to the Council and provided brief introductions of themselves to the new members of the Council.

Becky noted three current vacancies within the Council and working to fill these positions alongside the Governor's Office.

1. *Department of Public Instruction Designee*
2. *District Attorney's Office Appointee*
3. *American Indian Tribe/Band Appointee*

Becky shared with the Council Members a presentation on June 10th being provided by Councilmember Dr. Mike Koenigs to the Department of Justice regarding effective and accessible mental health supports and services for people currently or formerly incarcerated.

The minutes from the Council's meeting on February 18th, 2026 were reviewed and motion was made by Justin Kass to approve the minutes, and seconded by Ray Woodruff. The minutes were unanimously approved as written.

II. Executive Order #287 Relating to the Creation of the Governor's Commutation Advisory Board and Executive Order #288 Relating to the Creation of a Juvenile Life Sentence Commutation Process

Becky and Ray discussed the recent Executive Orders by Governor Tony Evers ([Executive Order #287](#) & [Executive Order #288](#)) relating to the Commutations process and what the Department of Corrections (DOC) has done since the Executive Orders were announced on April 3rd, 2026. The following is a summary of Ray and Becky sharing the DOC's response.

The DOC is supportive of persons in our care (PIOCs) having a mechanism/process for early release and this process could aid the strained system. The process that has been put into place is guided by the Governor's Office and Commutations board. The DOC doesn't have a lot of "front-end" influence on the process, but the DOC's intention is to be accommodating to the process and be as responsive as possible to the Governor's office and stakeholders.

The DOC does not intend to be gatekeepers to PIOCs and restrict who can apply. The Commutations announcement has some parameters for eligibility, but it is not the DOC's job to interpret eligibility. If a PIOC wants to apply, the DOC won't limit the ability of an individual to apply.

The application process is driven by the PIOC and each institution has a process in play to handle requests, but it is on the PIOC to submit the application. There has been an increased workload for staff relating to reviewing reviews and conduct reports from institutions. A lot of these files are paper files and requires physical retrieving them, reviewing, and printing copies of these records for the PIOC's application.

Anecdotally, there have been reports from institution of better behavior at some institutions and reduced restrictive housing.

The DOC has received a lot of communication from victims of crime that are concerned about what the Commutations process may mean for them and their notification. The DOC has an Office of Victim Services and Programs, who will work to inform registered victims of crime.

Once the application is submitted, the Commutation Board will review applications. If the application moves forward to a hearing, the board will reach out to the DOC for additional information relating to the PIOC and to include victim contact/consideration at the hearing.

After this discussion by Ray and Becky, they opened up a dialogue for the Council to discuss and ask questions.

Justin Kass asked the impacts at the administrative level of providing the necessary documentation to complete the application to the PIOC.

- *It is an administrative lift for institutions to assist PIOC. Most institution records and conduct reports are physical/analog files besides reports within the last five years. Everything prior to the last five years is paper and put into a physical file, which then has to be pulled and reviewed with the PIOC with a staff member present.*

Mike Koenigs asked who will be reviewing the applications and is the Commutations Board ready for reviewing these applications in a timely manner with a new Governor in January.

- *The Governor's Office has indicated they are ready to receive the applications and process them to review. The hope is for a phased/tiered process to assist people move through the Commutations process in a timely manner. With a new Governor, there are no assurances this process will continue with the new Governor.*

Andrew Murphy noted he is interested on the programming side and is curious to see if there will be an increase in programming as PIOC consider how can they make themselves more appealing to the Commutations board? Andrew noted graduates of Trinity University's program have been asking for support and letters of recommendations to assist applications and that there is buzz within the graduates that believe they have a shot.

- *Ray noted that the DOC is reviewing its Letters of Support process and has a policy regarding personal references, but are evaluating how can DOC staff provide letters of support for PIOC as a professional reference without opinion.*
- *Ray noted an early release mechanism for extraordinary health conditions and geriatric individuals, where a process is in play to provide documentation of support that is factual and not opinion based. DOC is reviewing its policy and best way forward to potentially provide Letters of Support for PIOC for the Commutations process, as some people don't have supports outside of the institution staff (Social Worker, Correctional Officer, etc.).*

Melissa Roberts noted the Parole Board has received an increase in letters of support from contracted staff.

Jeanne Geraci asked regarding those that potentially receive a Commutation and have their sentence reduced, would they still be offered reentry services?

- *The DOC has identified this need with the Governor's office that reentry planning is a must and that should be built into this process prior to PIOC releasing.*

Andrew asked what has been the process for communicating with the population?

- *The DOC has put out memos regarding the Commutations process that are posted at the facilities, as well as institutions have a system of broadcasting messages. The DOC is trying to put out accurate information, while acknowledging, the DOC doesn't have all the answers and sites are navigating this.*

Ray noted the potential impact on community stakeholders and the DOC is still processing that potential impact and if the Council has any partners or agencies that would like to assist the Commutations process for clients and/or reentry to please contact the DOC.

Carl Ashley noted judges have been sent materials regarding the Commutations process and doesn't appear to be a heavy lift, but that judges have an opportunity to be a part of hearings.

Carl Ashley indicated he heard over 250 applications have been filed with the Commutations board.

III. Department and/or Agency Representative Report Outs

Ray noted that Correctional Employees Week was a few weeks ago and appreciated being at sites and interacting with staff who are invested in success of PIOC's. An opportunity to reconnect with sites and the reentry work that is being done across the agency.

Ray noted the Friends and Family Forum was on April 9th at DOC's Central Office in Madison. It continues to be a good opportunity to hear from stakeholders of those incarcerated. Ray noted the DOC could do a better job of communicating out actions/results taken from Friends and Family Forums and the DOC Communications team is putting in an action plan to communicate updates with issues that arise at these forums.

Mike Koenigs noted that at Racine Correctional Institution (RCI), the warden invited Every Choice Has Opportunity (ECHO) to work with PIOC's at RCI who continue to return to segregated and restrictive housing. ECHO is provided by formerly incarcerated peer support specialists who provide an 8-week curriculum to individuals selected at RCI who were struggling with conduct at the institution. The graduation was held last Friday and had families show up, alongside the warden and ed director. The graduates shared what they learned and how their outlook has changed. Mike reiterated the importance of peer support specialists to assist PIOC's and get buy-in for programming from someone who has a similar experience.

Becky noted a Division of Community Corrections (DCC) regional office provided a Reentry Family Meeting, where the DOC would invite a client's family and agent who was nearing release. This provides an opportunity for face-to-face dialogue and share expectations of supervision. The DOC is monitoring this and may look to duplicate it throughout the state.

Brenda Rodriguez shared a personal experience with a formerly and currently incarcerated individual as a family/friend of the incarcerated and the difficulties and struggle that can present for the family. The individual has mental health and substance use concerns. The experience has been a lifelong struggle and the family can't see the light at the end of the tunnel as the individual just feels part of the system. The individual leaves a rehab facility, has been released with no connections, and sometimes never makes it home and the family is only contacted after the individual has been admitted to the hospital. Brenda noted this and the toll it takes on the family and struggle to not feel involved and/or engaged with the system. Brenda asked for support and guidance from another family with this experience or is there a different process that they can be involved with?

- *Carl Ashley thanked Brenda for sharing and noted the issues of persistent mental health with dual diagnosis of substance use that judges face. Many of the programs are voluntary and can't be mandatory by the judge, but the judge doesn't want the individual in the criminal justice system as it is not the best support to address mental health needs.*
- *Becky also thanked Brenda for sharing and noted trying to identify resources and referrals for clients that haven't been tried before and the formation of DOC Substance Advisory Committee that has been formed to assist and make connections for resources and process for individuals.*

- *Jeanne Geraci shared similar experience to Brenda as a family/friend of justice involved individual and the frustration of not feeling involved with release planning or feeling left out of communication. Jeanne indicated to Brenda to reach out to her to discuss to support Brenda with her experience.*

Mike Koenigs reiterated the importance of Peer Support Services and that lived experience to help assist PIOC's get connected and engaged with services for recovery, but issues can arise with funding for these positions.

- *Carl Ashley noted the issue of consistent resources and trying to scale up these positive programs and the importance of taking the message to those with the purse strings to utilize and scale up these effective resources.*
- *Ray noted 100s of individuals that are currently incarcerated are licensed as Certified Peer Specialists (CPS), but after they release, many of them cannot be reimbursed for CPS services provided at the institutions. Ray hopes as part of the waiver with DHS to allow CPS services to be reimbursed via Medicaid, which could assist to scale up resources for CPS and programming for individuals at institutions.*
 - o *Legislation was passed on April 9th, 2026 that allows DHS to submit waiver to Federal Government to provide incarcerated individuals prerelease health coverage services ([2025 Wisconsin Act 233](#))*

Justin Kass asked a follow-up regarding the Medicaid Waiver and if there was any information for the County Jails.

- *Ray noted that DHS has put together some guidance for County Jails and would share with Justin.*

Mike Koenig shared that a few Council members met to discuss priorities of the Council. One topic noted was Digital & Financial Literacy. Mike noted he discussed a UW Extension initiative at Oshkosh Correctional Institution and they are working on revamping that curriculum. Mike noted the importance of individuals addressing their value, identity, goals, and purpose via peer support. Essentially, how effective can financial literacy be if someone doesn't see themselves having a future. Mike noted that it could be multi-stage with peer support to address those values and identity and then move into financial/digital literacy to assist individuals reach those goals.

- *Becky noted she also met with UW Extension and are currently revamping the W2W curriculum for pre and post release and that this curriculum could potentially fit within this area where institutions have identified space.*

Becky shared a few areas where this Council can focus on for making change

- Peer Support
- Mental Health Support
- Digital/Financial Literacy
- Commutations

IV. **Next Council Meeting – August 26, 2026**

Meeting adjourned at 3:34 PM.