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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **WISDOM Calls on Governor Walker to Act NOW to Fix a Broken, Unjust and Wasteful Parole System**

2,887 men and women in the Wisconsin prison system are, as a matter of law, eligible for parole. Governor Walker and the Department of Corrections confirmed this as the number of people still in our prisons who were sentenced prior to January 1, 2000. The cost to keep these people in prison, most of them past the date they could be released, is estimated at more than \$85 million per year. But, parole is now only rarely granted. According to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau in 2011-12 only 150 paroles were granted (in contrast to 1651 granted in 2004).

All of these 2,887 prisoners have been in prison for more than thirteen years. Many have been there for fifteen, twenty, or more years and have done everything possible to comply with the conditions for their release, yet have encountered a system that makes their release impossible. The 2,887 were sentenced to prison at a time when judges trusted the Parole Board to determine when people convicted of crime, after having served a significant amount of time, could safely return to the community.

The system has broken faith with the judges who imposed the sentences, with the men and women who serve the sentences, and with their families. It has also broken faith with the taxpayers of Wisconsin.

On December 17, 2013, members of the WISDOM 11x15 Campaign met with Governor Walker's representative, and were promised answers to four requests by the end of January, 2014. Those requests were:

1. For a report of the number of prisoners currently in Wisconsin institutions who were sentenced prior to 1/1/2000 (when parole was part of the sentence);
2. For the Governor to order the Parole Board and the Department of Corrections to work cooperatively to make parole possible for all prisoners who were meeting the conditions and expectations placed on them by their judges;
3. For the Governor to order a review of each of the cases of parole-eligible inmates before the end of 2014;
4. For the Governor to appoint an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party "ombudsman" to conduct a thorough review of the system as it pertains to this population, and to issue a public report.

While we are grateful to have received a partial answer to the first request, we are very disappointed not to receive a considered response to numbers 2, 3 or 4.

The 11x15 campaign is not asking for the immediate release of all 2,887 prisoners at this time, and is not even calling for the release of any specific prisoners. We do call for an immediate, transparent, and complete review of a system that seems to have broken down.

Rev. Joseph Ellwanger of Milwaukee said, “While very little real data seems to have been kept, we know of many inmates who have completed every bit of required programming, and more, yet are denied parole. We have heard of other instances when the parole board has required certain programming as a condition for release, and the inmate has not been given the opportunity to complete that programming. We have seen inexplicable reports from the parole board that extoll exemplary conduct and effort by the inmate, and still simply deny parole. We have heard “insufficient time served” given as a reason to deny parole, even for prisoners who are many years beyond the date they were eligible. Something is wrong, and thousands of people suffer for it every day the state chooses not to act to correct it.”

WISDOM calls on the Governor of Wisconsin to use his authority to fix the system that keeps so many of these 2,887 prisoners locked up far beyond the necessary time, at great costs to the prisoners, to their families and to the taxpayers of Wisconsin.

For more information, please contact David Liners at 414-736-2099, or [david.liners1@gmail.com](mailto:david.liners1@gmail.com)

*The “11x15 Campaign for Safer, Healthier Communities” has grown from a call by members of the faith community for the state of Wisconsin to take action to cut the prison population in half (to 11,000) by the end of 2015. The campaign has called for an increased commitment to alternatives to incarceration for people with mental health and/or addiction issues. It is working for removal of barriers to success for those returning from jail or prison, so recidivism rates can be reduced. And, it is working to call attention to the need for reform of an outdated sentencing structure. The 11x15 campaign is a project of WISDOM, the network of congregation-based organizations throughout the state. The campaign has been supported by thousands of individuals and dozens of groups and organizations.*