

Wisconsin incarcerates its Black, male citizens at a rate of 12.8%. Lawmaker says panel should include at least one member of the Black community to ensure group has legislators and experts who truly represent those most affected.

MADISON - On Wednesday, Rep. **David Bowen** of Milwaukee sent a letter to Governor Walker requesting an appointment to the prison planning task force created in the 2017-18 budget. The Governor made a partial veto to this part of the budget allowing him to make unlimited appointments to the task force.



Earlier that same day, it had been reported that Assembly Speaker Robin Vos neglected to include a Democrat, or any member of color, with his three appointments. Wisconsin incarcerates its Black, male citizens at a rate of 12.8%, the highest of any state and nearly double the national average. For this reason, the Representative felt it unacceptable for the State Assembly's delegation to this task force not to have representation from the Black community.

Rep. Bowen feels the premeditated, partisan decision by Speaker Vos to leave Black voices out of this process will deny the State a dynamic panel of legislators and experts that truly represents those who are most affected. He wants the Governor to appoint him, or any other qualified person from among advocacy groups or their leaders, to the task force and thus ensure an honest conversation about evidence-based, best practices to improve the state's correctional system.

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The text of the complete letter is below for your convenience.

November 15, 2017

Governor Scott Walker
115 East State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Walker,

I am writing today as the Ranking Democratic member of the Assembly Committee on Corrections to formally request that you appoint me to serve on the Wisconsin prison planning task force that was created by the 2017-18 state budget.

Speaker Robin Vos has not only actively chosen not to use one of his three appointments to place a Democratic member on the task force, but he neglected to appoint an Assembly member who is Black. As you may know, Wisconsin incarcerates its Black, male citizens at a rate of 12.8%, the highest of any state and outpacing the national average by nearly double. It is unacceptable for the State Assembly's delegation to this task force not to have representation from the Black community.

Included in your partial vetoes of the state budget was one which, in addition to the three appointments from both the Assembly Speaker and Senate Majority Leader, allowed you to make unlimited appointments to this task force. I ask that you use the authority of your appointments to ensure a dynamic panel of legislators and experts that truly represents those who are most affected by Wisconsin's correctional system.

It is imperative that Wisconsin have a conversation about how to improve our corrections outcomes both for inmates and workers, and beyond that we must discuss how to reduce our prison population and recidivism with commonsense reforms. A huge aspect of that discussion is how to reduce our state's unconscionable Black male incarceration rate as well as the high cost to taxpayers.

While I am doubtful that Speaker Vos will reverse his premeditated, partisan decision to leave Black voices out of this process, I stand ready and willing to serve my community and my state on this task force so we can have an honest conversation about evidence-based, best practices to improve the state's correctional system. I would also be happy to provide you with recommendations of highly qualified advocacy groups and their leaders who work toward these goals every day who could serve effectively on this task force.

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to reach me to discuss further.

Sincerely,

David Bowen
State Representative
10th Assembly District