Thursday April 20, 2017

Dear Honorable Members of Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

YWCA Madison opposes AB 88 and AB 89.  Both of these bills will result in more Wisconsin residents being incarcerated.

AB 88 and AB 89 each increase the mandatory minimum incarceration time for certain crimes. Judges already have tremendous discretion to incarcerate individuals for a longer amount of time than minimally required. We are not aware of any community demand for increasing the mandatory minimums of any of these crimes. Even the very conservative Heritage Foundation in 2014 issued a report questioning the reasons behind mandatory minimums and arguing against mandating fixed penalties. Mandatory minimum sentences do not make communities safer but instead bind judges and force them to disregard the circumstances behind a crime. This will only lead to more Wisconsin residents incarcerated in our system.

Wisconsin has the highest racial disparities in incarceration in the nation, and it has led Wisconsin to be named one of the worst places to live for people of color.  These bills ignore the reality of our racially biased criminal justice system and will only worsen our disparities.

We urge you to vote down AB 88 and AB 89. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Carousel Bayrd, our Policy and Partnership Coordinator, at (608) 395-2196.

Sincerely,

Vanessa McDowell  
Interim CEO