Wednesday March 29, 2017

Dear Honorable Members of Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety,

YWCA Madison strongly supports SB 53.  We thank the sponsors for introducing this important bill.  
  
Wisconsin residents face tremendous obstacles when they exit the criminal justice system. Despite the fact that they have completed their sentences, they still continue to pay for their convictions.  Upon community reentry, individuals struggle to find housing and employment.  Landlords use criminal background to screen out potential tenants, and employers often also use criminal background to limit who is eligible for employment.  Because of the racial disparities in the criminal justice system in our state, this often perpetuates a legal form of discrimination.

Stable housing and employment are essential for reducing recidivism. Without these basic fundamental needs met, individuals are left struggling, often for the rest of their lives. SB 53 offers our fellow Wisconsin residents a way out of this struggle, to return into our communities and to live and contribute to society.  When people have opportunities, stable housing, and employment, they are much more likely to be successful. This, in turn, reduces crime, increases community safety, and promotes family stability. SB 53 gives individuals, and our communities, a second chance.

YWCA Madison also supports the passage of SB 57. While this bill will apply to a narrow number of criminal offenses, we appreciate the gesture of this bill in recognizing the impact of felony convictions.  We hope you support this bill.  And we hope that after its success is documented, the state will expand its reach beyond Class I felonies.

Please support SB 53 and SB 57. 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