

February 9, 2021

Testimony of ACLU of Wisconsin
In Support of Senate Bill 78
Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety



Chair Wanggaard and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 78, the Pathway to Employment legislation, which reforms our current laws on expungement. The ACLU of Wisconsin is pleased to endorse this bipartisan step in the right direction which will have a positive impact upon thousands of people in our state.

The ACLU is working nationally and locally with bipartisan coalitions to adopt smart reforms in the criminal justice system that reduce prison populations, reduce recidivism, and make communities safer and stronger.

People who have a record of a criminal conviction also have many barriers to employment, and this legislation works to address these barriers. The two most crucial changes that will be enacted in this legislation are that the requirement that a judge must make the expungement determination "at the time of sentencing" is removed, along with the age 25 restriction on expungement eligibility. These important changes will allow many individuals to complete the terms of their sentence and move on with their lives. This legislation creates an opportunity for redemption for men and women with previous convictions, for them to move past a mistake and towards a brighter future where there are fewer barriers to employment, housing, parenting, and many other activities of daily life.

We are looking forward to seeing more bills from the state legislature that address the record levels of incarceration, per capita spending, and racial disparities in our state's criminal legal system.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposed legislation.