Wisconsin’s Mass Incarceration of African American Males
The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world.

Incarceration rates per 100,000 population
Wisconsin has the highest rate of African American men in state prison and local jails (1 in 8).

2010 Census estimates
Wisconsin’s incarceration rate for black men is 10 times higher than for whites.
Over half of African American men in their 30s and half of men in their early 40s from Milwaukee County have been in state prison.
Home residence of African American male prisoners (incarcerated and released)
2/3 of the county’s incarcerated African American men come from 6 zip codes in the poorest neighborhoods of Milwaukee.

Concentration of released and incarcerated ex-offenders in Milwaukee ZIP code 53206
How did this happen?
The prison population in Wisconsin has more than tripled since 1990, fueled by

- increased government funding for drug enforcement (rather than treatment) and prison construction
- mandatory minimum sentence laws
- truth-in-sentencing replacing judicial discretion in setting punishments
- concentrated policing in minority communities
- state incarceration for minor probation and supervision violations
Wisconsin incarcerated 26,222 African American men from Milwaukee County in state correctional facilities from 1990-2011.
Yearly prison admissions with drug-related offenses
(Milwaukee County men; some have admissions in multiple years.)
40% of the black men are incarcerated with drug offenses.
1/3 of the black men have only non-violent offenses.
Half of released prisoners are still in their 20s and 30s. Yet prison records often limit employment options for rest of workers’ lives.
The 26,222 men spent over 116,000 years (42.6 million days) in prison (1990-2012).

It costs $512,000 a day to incarcerate 5,631 Milwaukee County African Americans (as of January 2012).
2011-2013 state appropriations: more for corrections than the University of Wisconsin/UWEX system

DOC funding = $2.25 billion

UW System funding = $2.1 billion
Workforce Challenges
MASS INCARCERATION OF BLACK MALES MUST STOP

Alternatives from religious groups, Milwaukee County DA, and The Sentencing Project deserve serious consideration.
WORKFORCE PROPOSALS

• Make African American males the state’s #1 jobs priority.
• Expand transitional jobs programs for released inmates and for offenders diverted from incarceration.

Milwaukee would hire ex-criminals, jobless to fix potholes under plan

By Don Walker of the Journal Sentinel

When Milwaukee announced that it would hire 25 poor, unemployed people to help city crews fill the innumerable potholes that plague city streets, the phones at City Hall rang off the hook.

More than 330 calls came in within two hours of Mayor Tom Barrett announcing the jobs earlier this month, said Jennifer Meyer-Staamer of the Unified Call Center. To date, more than 550 callers have inquired about the jobs, which will pay $10.10 an hour, she said.

The 25 jobs are among the 1,000 transitional, subsidized jobs envisioned as part of the new Transform Milwaukee Jobs program through Gov. Scott Walker’s Transform Milwaukee initiative.

The new $8.5 million transitional jobs program will operate only in Milwaukee and will be restricted to hiring workers within a certain geographic area of the city.

The jobs, in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors and the government, will pay the minimum wage, of $7.25 an hour, which will be subsidized by the state for at least 20 hours a week. Employers who can subsidize the wages at a higher minimum, as the city is doing.

It’s modeled after a similar subsidized, transitional jobs program that the state piloted between September 2010 and June 2013 that cost $26 community-based organizations.

Funds for the program came from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, program and through federal recovery and reinvestment funds.

An evaluation of that pilot project showed that 3,059 individuals worked in transitional jobs, and 1,686 went on to unsubsidized employment when their time in the program ended.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Employment & Training Institute
• Increase vocational education and workforce training for ex-offenders.
• Provide comprehensive employment training and job placement programs for black male youth.
• Support driver’s license recovery programs for ex-offenders and non-offenders.

Only 10% of the ex-offenders have a current valid driver’s license.
• Restore free driver’s education in Milwaukee high schools.

Milwaukee African American Males (Ages 16-17): License Status

- Est. no license, no suspensions: 80%
- Probationary license: 8%
- Instruction permit: 9%
- No license, with suspension: 3%
• Divert technical violators of DOC supervision rules, change supervision rules to more meaningful conditions.
• Modify CCAP public internet postings to stop publishing all ex-offenders’ charges and offenses for life.
For more info
Mass Incarceration Studies

- "Wisconsin’s Mass Incarceration of African American Males" (2013)
- "Statewide Imprisonment of Black Men in Wisconsin" (2014)

Wisconsin’s rate of imprisoning African American men in state prisons and local jails is the highest in the U.S., according to 2010 Census data. Analysis of state public inmate files shows statewide mass incarceration, with half of African American men in their 30s having served time in prison. In Milwaukee County 40% of young men in their late 20s have already been incarcerated by the state.

The cumulative numbers of black male former inmates living in Milwaukee’s poorest neighborhoods remain a most serious, and largely unaddressed, concern for their lack of employment options and economic well-being. In Wisconsin ex-offenders’ prison records (with very few exceptions) remain posted on the state court system’s website for the rest of their lives. Released prisoners are subject to Department of Corrections’ supervision which can result in their re-imprisonment at any time for minor and technical supervision infractions, and most live in neighborhoods with highly concentrated policing and concentrated poverty.

Current Research

- "Wisconsin Driver’s License Suspensions for Failure-to-Pay-Forfeitures" (2014)
Project Milwaukee: Black Men in Prison

WUWM & MPTV Special Series
Why are so many Wisconsinites behind bars?
And, what are the costs?

In the 2010 Census, Wisconsin had the highest percentage of incarcerated black men in the nation. One out of every eight black men of working age is behind bars. In Milwaukee County, more than half of African American men in their thirties have served time in prison.

Over the course of six months, WUWM and MPTV explored Wisconsin's high rate of black male incarceration, through expert analysis and personal stories.