



STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN

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To: Members, Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee
From: State Bar of Wisconsin Board of Governors
Date: December 17, 2025
Re: Support for SB 577 – exoneree compensation

The State Bar of Wisconsin, a statewide organization representing over 25,000 attorney members, is committed to the mission of improving access to justice for all of Wisconsin's citizens. As part of that mission, the State Bar's governing body, the Board of Governors, advocates on behalf of a variety of issues and policy decisions of significance to the legal profession, the public, and the justice system.

With that mission in mind, the State Bar of Wisconsin's Board of Governors supports SB 577, wrongful conviction compensation legislation, which would increase compensation limits for individuals who were victims of wrongful convictions and imprisonment. We want to thank Sen. Wanggaard and Rep. Rodriguez, and all the other legislative co-sponsors for supporting this important legislation.

Being exonerated of a crime is only the beginning for an individual. Upon release, sometimes after decades of wrongful imprisonment, exonerees are left with little to no resources as they re-enter society. In recognition of this, Wisconsin became a leader in providing a statutory mechanism for compensating exonerees over a century ago. However, Wisconsin's statute has not been updated in decades and is now the most inadequate in the nation.

Currently, the State Claims Board can award compensation to exonerated individuals but is limited to \$5,000 per year of wrongful imprisonment, capped at a maximum of \$25,000. In addition, there is no provision for assistance with education, housing, health care, counseling, employment, or anything else that the system could provide for an exoneree.

This proposal is a significant step forward in correcting these deficiencies. Most importantly, there is an increase in compensation limits to \$50,000/year with a \$1 million maximum. In addition, exonerees could be eligible for one year of health insurance for each year imprisoned, receive transition assistance from the Department of Corrections, and request records related to the case be sealed. The proposal would also create a timelier process for hearing and deciding compensation claims, while also ensuring that those who committed related offenses or subsequent serious felonies – do not receive a windfall.

Even one innocent person being convicted of a crime is a tragedy. SB 577 is an attempt to correct those errors in the judicial system, ensuring exonerees are appropriately compensated for the injustice they suffered and the years of freedom they lost while receiving support as they re-enter society. As such, **the State Bar of Wisconsin's Board of Governors respectfully requests support from the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee on SB 577.**

For more information, or to speak with a member of the State Bar about this legislation, please do not hesitate to contact the State Bar lobbyists, Cale Battles, cbattles@wisbar.org or (608) 695-5686, or Lynne Davis, ldavis@wisbar.org or (608) 852-3603.

The views expressed on this issue were approved by the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Wisconsin. Members of the Board of Governors approve and maintain the association's public policy positions that are taken in accordance with the associations' bylaws and rules.

The State Bar of Wisconsin is the mandatory professional association, created by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, for attorneys who hold a Wisconsin law license. With more than 25,000 members, the State Bar aids the courts in improving the administration of justice, provides continuing legal education for its members to help them maintain their expertise, and assists Wisconsin lawyers in carrying out community service initiatives to educate the public about the legal system and the value of lawyers. For more information, visit www.wisbar.org.