

Chair Wanggaard, Vice-Chair James, and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 577.

In 1913, Wisconsin became the first state in the nation to compensate individuals wrongfully convicted of a crime. Today, the vast majority of states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government now compensate those wrongfully convicted. However, Wisconsin has not updated the compensation these individuals can receive since 1980, when the yearly cap was raised from \$1,500 a year to \$5,000 and the overall cap was raised from \$5,000 to \$25,000.

This bill would increase the yearly compensation from \$5,000 to \$50,000 and increase the overall cap from \$25,000 to \$1 million. Exonerees may be eligible to receive assistance with sealing of records, health insurance, and other transition support from the Department of Corrections.

No amount of money can fully compensate someone for a wrongful conviction and the countless financial, social, psychological, and physical impacts of incarceration, but this bill would at least bring Wisconsin closer in line with other states and the federal government in terms of monetary compensation.

