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[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** The following program is a PBS Wisconsin original production.

[00:00:25] **Speaker 2** How will a $13 an hour pay raise for correctional officers ease conditions at Wisconsin prisons? How border communities are dealing with marijuana crossing through and more university campuses. Feel the budget ax. I'm Fredricka Freiberg tonight. I'm here and now. Why short staffed state prisons means more lockdowns. Then Zach Schultz reports on legal marijuana surrounding Wisconsin. A former vice chancellor urges caution when it comes to closing two year campuses and the next Wisconsin in black and white. This week, health divides. It's here and now for October 27th. Funding for here and Now is provided by the Focus Fund for Journalism and Friends of PBS Wisconsin. Three Wisconsin prisons have such a shortage of correctional officers. They are on some form of lockdown or, as the agency prefers, modified movement. For example, at the maximum security Waupun prison, the vacancy rate for guards, sits at about 53%. At the green Bay prison, it's a 41% vacancy rate, and at Stanley it's nearly 44%. And looking to attract people to become corrections officers have been hitting airwaves and online recently. The Department of Corrections expects to be able to recruit and retain more officers, with the newly approved pay bump from $20 an hour to $33. A raise that went into effect this week. The Wisconsin Policy Forum just released a report titled Prison Blues, which explored prison spending in the state. Research Director Jason Stein joins us on this. And thanks a lot for being here. My pleasure. Thank you. So the Department of Corrections describes a dire staffing shortage in its prisons, as evidenced by the lock down of. Max security. Well, Ponder's, we just mentioned with that 53% vacancy rate. How should this pay bump ameliorate this problem?

[00:02:38] **Speaker 3** You know, it's going to help. Obviously, across the labor market we've seen employer challenges, turnover rates rising. And that's across state government. But in our state institutions are 24 seven institutions. That's where it's been most acute. I think the challenges in 2022, there were more than 2000 vacancies within the prison system. So when you think about and you can't simply bring someone in off the street, put them in a place like pond and have them walk the line. You have to train these people. So they're going to turn the ship in the water. But it's a big ship at a long term.

[00:03:11] **Speaker 2** How long coming has this pay rate has been?

[00:03:14] **Speaker 3** You know, it took us years to get in this position of across state government and particularly within the prison system, having these vacancies and this gap between what the state was willing to pay and what people were willing to do, because coming to work every day in a prison is a very difficult job. And so it's going to take time to get out of this hole.

[00:03:38] **Speaker 2** Adding to that problem, the state's 37 prisons are over capacity with those incarcerated or incarcerated. And this has long been the case. And we incarcerate more people than neighboring states. Why this mismatch with our neighbors?

[00:03:54] **Speaker 3** You know, going back to the 90s, Wisconsin, built a large prison system. And despite the fact that it's a large system, it's been over capacity. Even when we dipped in population during the pandemic, we remain over capacity. You know, it comes down to, we incarcerate at higher rates than our neighbors, higher rates, the national average. And that leads to per capita spending on corrections being higher in Wisconsin than in our neighboring states. You know, this is, again, something that you cannot change overnight. But there are things that the state can do in the state has the resources now to try and bend this curve over the next generation.

[00:04:34] **Speaker 2** And how do you bend the curve, curve in that way?

[00:04:38] **Speaker 4** You know.

[00:04:39] **Speaker 3** One, the biggest contributor to incarceration in the state has been revocations. So it's not people that are committing a crime for the first time. It may be a crime, but there are people who've been released on extended supervision into the community. And something whether it's substance abuse, whether it's, a mental health challenge, whether it's new criminal activity is landing them back in the system. And so the state has been has been testing methods and has actually lowered that revocation rate. And so that will make a difference going forward. But then we also have to, ensure that public safety is maintained while those revocation rates are lowered as well.

[00:05:21] **Speaker 2** Right. And I can imagine that's the kind of effort that takes a while to to bring those numbers down. Correct.

[00:05:27] **Speaker 3** I mean, you know, substance abuse, mental health challenges, these are very difficult problems to deal with for anyone in the population. And, you know, one area where the state, one bright spot is the state does have, within its large state surplus, the ability to invest in targeted, to, you know, to experiment and invest in targeted methods to try and deal with these problems.

[00:05:52] **Speaker 2** So Wisconsin is spending $2.76 billion on corrections in the current state budget. Again, more per inmate than surrounding states. And is it a function of just having more inmates and more prisons that we're spending more than our surrounding states?

[00:06:09] **Speaker 3** Yeah, it's largely a function of that. And the thing that people need to understand is state prisons are not something that the federal government is going to give you money for. It's not something that any other state is going to give you money for. You're going to have to pay for that as a state with your own tax dollars. And so. Finding ways to ensure public safety but also minimize corrections. Spending over time is going through. The savings is almost entirely going to go to taxpayers if you can thread that needle.

[00:06:37] **Speaker 2** Hopefully people will start threading that, you know. Jason Stein, thanks very much. Thank you. Wisconsin is surrounded by legal marijuana, with both Illinois and Michigan legalizing the recreational use of marijuana in the last few years and Minnesota voting to do the same earlier this year. It's estimated more than half of all state residents over the age of 21 live within a 75 minute drive to a legal dispensary, and that number will only increase. Here are now senior political reporter Zach Schultz explains how this leaves Wisconsin residents and law enforcement caught in a gray area, where a product purchased legally in another state becomes illegal the minute it crosses the border.

[00:07:24] **Speaker 5** The highway 41 bridge travels over the Menominee River, carrying you out of Wisconsin and into Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Take the first right and you're in the parking lot of a recreational marijuana dispensary. If you go through the drive thru, you don't even need to exit your car to purchase legal marijuana products and start the drive back across the river.

[00:07:47] **Speaker 6** Yeah, just a really optimal location.

[00:07:50] **Speaker 5** Lindsay Martinek is the director of retail operations for Higher Love. She says most of their customers are from over the border.

[00:07:57] **Speaker 6** A good majority are folks from Wisconsin.

[00:08:00] **Speaker 5** They're currently operating out of a trailer but are building a permanent location next door.

[00:08:05] **Speaker 6** The folks that are coming to us from Wisconsin, we get to to bring more people into the higher love family. And, we're just happy to be able to provide the products and services and supports for people from other states and be nice and close to the border for for convenience.

[00:08:22] **Speaker 5** But when their customers cross the bridge into Marinette, the product they just bought is illegal.

[00:08:27] **Speaker 1** It's pretty consistent that. Cars that are stopped. Have, you know, marijuana products, especially if they're, you know, traveling through the area or not necessarily from the area.

[00:08:39] **Speaker 5** Patrick Callahan is a narcotics investigator for the Marinette County Sheriff's Office.

[00:08:44] **Speaker 4** My office. We are charged with enforcing the laws. Marijuana is against the law in the state of Wisconsin in any form.

[00:08:51] **Speaker 5** Desha morrow is the Marinette County district attorney. Together, they're trying to figure out how to handle the surge of Wisconsin residents taking day trips for recreational marijuana.

[00:09:03] **Speaker 1** You know, that 141 corridor, within the drug unit kind of had, the nickname of the Green Highway, the green corridor, just because it was very well known for several years now since those dispensaries opened up, that that was kind of the quickest access point, for legal weed, for, you know, close to near a million people, residents of Wisconsin.

[00:09:24] **Speaker 5** So far, most people pulled over with small amounts of dispensary marijuana, have avoided arrest. Instead, they likely receive a citation and the confiscation of their purchase.

[00:09:35] **Speaker 4** There's always been a triage approach. There has to be in this line of work and and so, yes, if it's. A small amount of weed that may be treated differently than a small amount of heroin.

[00:09:48] **Speaker 5** On April 20th of this year, a marinette sheriff's deputy pulled over a car with two men and seized a backpack full of recreational marijuana. When the sheriff's office displayed the bust on their Facebook page, the post attracted thousands of comments ranging from ridicule to support.

[00:10:06] **Speaker 1** I don't think people realize that that's not everything that we got. I mean, we had 4 or 5 other interdiction stops that day and that was just one one traffic stop. So, you know, there was a lot of feedback. But, you know, we revert to the district attorney and the laws of the state of Wisconsin.

[00:10:21] **Speaker 5** The two men received ordinance citations for $263. They had traveled from Oshkosh more than 100 miles away. In many ways, it's not surprising, as some of the dispensaries start advertising on billboards as far south as fond du Lac.

[00:10:37] **Speaker 6** The more we can advertise and let people know that we're here, the better.

[00:10:40] **Speaker 5** Lindsay Hartwick says the risk belongs to the customer, and it's a risk they're clearly willing to take.

[00:10:46] **Speaker 6** They know that where they're heading, it's not legal and no one wants to be in that light. So we do make sure to try to express to our customers what to pay attention to if they are crossing that line.

[00:10:58] **Speaker 4** It's clear that the most dangerous thing about cannabis in Wisconsin is that it is illegal.

[00:11:02] **Speaker 5** Senator Melissa Eggert is a Democrat from Madison.

[00:11:05] **Speaker 4** We are an island of prohibition. And prohibition did not work in Wisconsin. And when it came to alcohol or margarine, it's not working when it comes to cannabis.

[00:11:13] **Speaker 5** She's been traveling the state on her grassroots tour promoting her bill to legalize recreational marijuana in Wisconsin.

[00:11:20] **Speaker 4** And it is clear nearly seven out of ten people in Wisconsin support responsible adult use policy for cannabis. With the medicinal component.

[00:11:29] **Speaker 5** However, Senator Egger doesn't have any Republican support for her bill, which means it may not get a hearing, much less get a vote on the floor.

[00:11:38] **Speaker 4** So for the last three sessions, I've been working on a bill around medical marijuana, and it's slowly gaining. Caucuses are very much more open to it.

[00:11:48] **Speaker 5** Senator Mary Fells Koski is a Republican. Her district includes most of Marinette County. Her proposal would legalize medicinal marijuana, which would require a patient to see a doctor to get a prescription. As a cancer survivor, she wants to see more options for pain management.

[00:12:06] **Speaker 4** I'm trying to help patients. You know, I know people who have had very debilitating medical conditions are veterans, the PTSD, masks and. I have firsthand knowledge of what opioids do to you as a side effect.

[00:12:24] **Speaker 5** But she's facing stiff opposition from her Republican colleagues who see medical marijuana as a gateway to recreational marijuana. She says a guard's bill doesn't help.

[00:12:35] **Speaker 4** And Melissa is very much in favor of this. And she can do, you know, whatever. But it may it does make it harder in our caucus. And I think a lot of, a lot of our caucus members are looking at this going, you know, we don't want to be Illinois. We don't want to be Minnesota.

[00:12:49] **Speaker 5** Haggard says Felts Koski last version of the bill didn't go far enough.

[00:12:53] **Speaker 4** So devil is in the details with all policy making. And Senator Fells Koski, has been outspoken about her support for medicinal cannabis and Wisconsin.

[00:13:02] **Speaker 5** But while the debate hasn't even started at the Capitol, the car still head north on highway 41, and Morrow says they'd appreciate some clarity from Madison.

[00:13:12] **Speaker 4** They need to look at laws that are going to protect our young people, and also to send a very clear, message to to people in the state, but also to law enforcement to give us bright lines on how to enforce this. I don't really have advice for them. I feel bad that they're put in this position. I think they're in an untenable situation where what what is the win here? I mean, there there really is no win.

[00:13:40] **Speaker 5** Fells Koski says she's hoping to get a public hearing on her bill and maybe a vote on the floor, but final passage may still be a long ways off.

[00:13:49] **Speaker 4** It's a heavy lift this session. I'm not gonna say it's not. But I'm optimistic. I'm optimistic.

[00:13:56] **Speaker 5** Reporting from Marinette. I'm Zach Schultz for here and now.

[00:14:02] **Speaker 2** In education news. UW Platteville announced this week it is cutting 111 positions to make up more than $9 million deficit. And the University of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman has already announced the closure of in-person instruction at the fond du Lac and West Bend two year campuses, and the definitive closing of UW Richland. We sat down this week with Steve Will Duke, vice chancellor emeritus of UW colleges and UW extension, who is critical of this move. We should note PBS Wisconsin is part of UW Madison. We started by asking his reaction.

[00:14:41] **Speaker 1** I think what my reaction was, not total surprise. My concern was at those in, at those campuses was that, they were, convenient casualties of enrollment challenges at the four year institutions when the UW colleges and UW extension were dissolved, by the UW system leadership in 2018, that began a very precipitous drop in enrollments at the two year campuses starting in 2019. That brought us to the current day. And if you look at, again, those campuses that were attached at that time to UW Milwaukee, Oshkosh and Platteville, the connection is very, very clear. That that did not help those campuses.

[00:15:36] **Speaker 2** So how should the UW respond to falling enrollment and with IT budgets that are in the red? Not just on two year campuses, but, across the system?

[00:15:49] **Speaker 1** Well, this didn't happen overnight. I would contend that enrollment is not the problem. Then Realmente is the symptom that evolved from the problem of not adequately managing as a UW system. The supply and demand across its universities. And that's called enrollment management. And we have not had a systemwide enrollment management strategy. Literally since 2004, 2005.

[00:16:19] **Speaker 2** Do you think, though, that the state of Wisconsin and its public UW institutions, are there too many of them? Given the demographics.

[00:16:32] **Speaker 1** Before we, begin shutting doors forever and backing out of agreements with communities who put up real money to build and maintain these campuses. We have to step back and put a moratorium on any more door closures and have this conversation about where we're going with this in higher education in Wisconsin.

[00:16:55] **Speaker 2** In fact, you you said that, what you're seeing is the disintegration of the system. And you are concerned that it will get worse. How so?

[00:17:08] **Speaker 1** I think that the two year campuses have, are in a very vulnerable spot. That they have been attached to four year campuses who will continue to see enrollment pressures. And I think that the commitment and the promise that the UW system and the Board of Regents made to those communities back in the 1960s, in exchange, they they got these campuses all under the local property tax dollar. I'm afraid that commitment in that partnership has been put off to the side and out of the conversation. We have to put that right back in the middle of the conversation, because that's how these communities came to be.

[00:17:52] **Speaker 2** What is the best path forward?

[00:17:54] **Speaker 1** I have not see a willingness to have a broad public, strategic conversation about where we're going with higher education in Wisconsin. I am calling on the legislature to throw that yellow flag on the field, to use a football metaphor. To say, time out. We're doing things that are permanent. We're doing things that will have lifelong negative consequences on communities for which we have a high level of obligation, and we're closing doors to higher education at a time when this state needs a higher level of degree holders. It needs better paying jobs. We are becoming much less attractive to high school graduates in the UW system than we were even seven years ago. We have to open that can of worms. To really take a close look at what we're doing and how we want to move forward as a state, and whether or not the existing structures of the UW system and the technical colleges, which, again, are very different from those in other states, are serving our citizens and our residents in Wisconsin the very best that they can.

[00:19:18] **Speaker 2** All right, Steve, well, thanks very much.

[00:19:21] **Speaker 1** Thank you.

[00:19:23] **Speaker 2** As to the closures, University of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman said in a statement, quote, it's time for us to realign our branch campuses to current market realities and prepare for the future. The status quo, he said, is not sustainable. Turning now to our series of special reports on race with Wisconsin in Black and White, in partnership with the Nehemia Center for Urban Leadership Development. Over the last three weeks, reporter Nathan Benzine explored disparities in homeownership and the racial wealth gap in Wisconsin. Tonight, we continue our reporting with the first of four stories on racial health disparities, starting with why the social determinants of health are so important to outcomes. Here's the first installment of Wisconsin in Black and White. Health divides.

[00:20:20] **Speaker 1** Across the board. Black people in Wisconsin suffer disproportionately from bad health and or barriers to health care. Black children in the state are four times more likely to have lead poisoning than their white peers. Also in Wisconsin, black people die younger than almost all other races, and black women are far more likely to die during pregnancy or in childbirth than white women. The statistics are so bad for black people that in 2019, Milwaukee County declared racism a public health crisis. We can say all health disparities are a direct consequence of being an American descendant of slavery. Tito Izard is the president and CEO for Milwaukee Health Services, where he opened a clinic in an underserved neighborhood. He says that because racism impacts every aspect of black Wisconsinites life, it affects their health. Health is is again the natural consequence of the condition or the environment that has been created. Black people.

[00:21:21] **Speaker 2** Indigenous people are.

[00:21:23] **Speaker 4** Disproportionately likely to be.

[00:21:25] **Speaker 1** In impoverished.

[00:21:26] **Speaker 4** And socially.

[00:21:28] **Speaker 1** Stratified circumstances. Tiffany Green is a professor for population health sciences at UW Madison.

[00:21:36] **Speaker 4** We know that having unstable housing, not having enough food and being poor, those contribute to outcomes. Health is not just things that are going on in your.

[00:21:46] **Speaker 2** Physical body, but it is your emotional well-being, your mental well-being, your spiritual health, even your social health.

[00:21:54] **Speaker 1** Doctor Jasmine Zapata is the chief medical officer for community health at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. She says health is much more than trips to the doctor.

[00:22:05] **Speaker 2** The things that happen outside of the clinic walls have more of an.

[00:22:09] **Speaker 4** Impact on one's health outcomes and quality of life.

[00:22:12] **Speaker 2** Than the very things we do in.

[00:22:14] **Speaker 4** The hospitals and.

[00:22:15] **Speaker 1** Clinics. All of those factors outside of the clinic are known as the social determinants of health. Broadly, social.

[00:22:22] **Speaker 2** Determinants of health refers.

[00:22:23] **Speaker 4** To.

[00:22:23] **Speaker 2** Non medical factors that.

[00:22:26] **Speaker 3** Influence.

[00:22:26] **Speaker 4** One's health outcomes.

[00:22:28] **Speaker 2** Where people are born, where they age, where they grow, where they live, where they work. Things outside.

[00:22:36] **Speaker 4** Of the traditional.

[00:22:37] **Speaker 2** Medical model that we think of when we.

[00:22:39] **Speaker 3** Think about health.

[00:22:40] **Speaker 1** Outcomes. When it comes to where black Wisconsinites live. Only a quarter of them own their own home. And they face one of the highest income gaps in the country, a gap that has persisted since 1968. Another important social determinant. How close you are to fresh food. Black Wisconsinites are five times more likely to live in a food desert than white residents.

[00:23:03] **Speaker 2** We generally don't have control.

[00:23:04] **Speaker 3** Of the food that we have in our community. You know, grocery stores, full service grocery stores, oftentimes far away from our communities.

[00:23:12] **Speaker 1** Reggie Jackson educate people about diversity. He says that living in a food desert means much of your food comes from gas stations or convenience stores, where the only options are highly processed.

[00:23:24] **Speaker 3** People don't have access to healthy food or they can't afford healthy food.

[00:23:28] **Speaker 2** We didn't just come to this.

[00:23:29] **Speaker 4** Place where black and brown.

[00:23:31] **Speaker 1** People are disproportionately.

[00:23:33] **Speaker 2** Likely to live.

[00:23:34] **Speaker 1** In resource deprived.

[00:23:35] **Speaker 4** Environments. It is.

[00:23:37] **Speaker 1** It's racism. But despite the declaration that racism is a public health crisis, Izard says not much has been done in Milwaukee since 2019 that brings parity to health outcomes. Making that declaration without subsequent steps, though, is disingenuous. So for most people in the community, it's like, okay, well, we hear that statement. Tell us something that we don't know already, right? For Izzard, the only path forward is to improve all of the determinants of health. The Madison based Nehemia is a community group working to take those subsequent steps.

[00:24:16] **Speaker 4** When you start to shift systems, then you start to actually impact the outcomes.

[00:24:20] **Speaker 1** Kim Neutral is now the community outreach facilitator at the UW School of Nursing. When she worked as a public health nurse, she enrolled in Nehemiah's justified anger Black History for a New Day course. The nine week course teaches the community about race, history and justice.

[00:24:39] **Speaker 4** I think something like this course helps us zoom out and recognize that we all are who we are because of everything that came before us.

[00:24:49] **Speaker 1** Neutral said the course helped her realize the full scope of how racism has affected health care, and shifted her perspective to see patients more holistically.

[00:24:58] **Speaker 4** Health care is important. Your genetic makeup is important, but significantly more important are the social, economic and environmental factors. And these are the things that that we know. Racism is, you know, embedded within.

[00:25:12] **Speaker 1** The course also helped neutrals public health team find out why young black students in one grade school were repeatedly absent from class.

[00:25:21] **Speaker 4** And one of the main factors was the walking route to school didn't feel safe.

[00:25:26] **Speaker 1** So the team worked to make the path safe and inviting again. First, they installed better lighting in a tunnel that felt unsafe, but then went further.

[00:25:36] **Speaker 4** We raised money to respond to their idea of putting in a mural that the kids designed.

[00:25:42] **Speaker 1** After adding the lights, the mural, and a few other improvements. Absence rates improved.

[00:25:49] **Speaker 4** And we did show at the end of that kids sense of safety and sense of belonging and connection both to the school as well as to their community. And, and that walking route really shifted for them.

[00:26:01] **Speaker 1** That shift brought healthy change and access to opportunity in the children's lives, who now felt safe enough to walk to school every day. It's good to become aware is better to actually, transform that into actual actionable items. What are you specifically going to do for here and now? I'm Nathan Benzine.

[00:26:26] **Speaker 2** For more on this and other issues facing Wisconsin, visit our website at PBS wisconsin.org and then click on the news tab. That's our program for tonight I'm Frederica Freiberg. Have a good weekend. Funding for Here and Now is provided by the Focus Fund for Journalism and Friends of PBS Wisconsin.