

**D21-07**  
**Effect of a Criminal Conviction**

Date: March 18, 2021  
Proposed by: DWD  
Prepared by: Bureau of Legal Affairs

**ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED UI LAW CHANGE**  
**Effect of a Criminal Conviction**

**1. Description of Proposed Change**

When the Department refers matters for criminal prosecution, it has usually already issued an administrative determination that the individual concealed information with the amount of the overpayment and penalty owed to the Department. The Department may use its statutory administrative collections powers, such as issuing warrants or levies, the Treasury Offset Program, interception of state income tax refunds, etc., to collect debts assessed by administrative determinations under the unemployment law. At the end of the criminal case, the Department may continue to collect the debt as assessed under the administrative determination. Or, the Department of Corrections may collect restitution, which would be credited toward the administratively determined debt.

In some circumstances, however, criminal prosecution may result in a court-ordered restitution order or judgment when the Department has not issued an administrative determination that a debt is owed. Examples could include submitting forged documents to the Department with the expectation that the forger would receive a benefit; submitting false unemployment benefit claims by using a fictitious employer scheme; or filing benefit claims using stolen identities. In certain circumstances, these acts could be federal crimes, such as mail or wire fraud. These serious crimes may result in convictions and court-ordered restitution without the Department having first issued an administrative determination.

The Department proposes a law change to make criminal conviction judgments binding on criminal defendants for the purposes of proceedings that arise under the unemployment law.

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This is consistent with federal law.<sup>1</sup> The standard of proof in criminal cases is beyond a reasonable doubt, which is a greater burden than in civil unemployment cases. It is not the intent of this proposal to change the Department's practice with respect to nearly all cases referred for criminal prosecution. The Department intends to continue to refer most cases for prosecution after its administrative determination is final.

## **2. Proposed Statutory Changes**

**Section 108.101(5) of the statutes is created to read:**

Notwithstanding sub. (4), a final order or judgment of conviction for a crime entered by a court is binding on the convicted person in an action or proceeding under this chapter that relates to the criminal conviction. A person convicted of a crime is precluded from denying the essential allegations of the criminal offense that is the basis for the conviction in an action or proceeding under this chapter.

## **3. Effects of Proposed Change**

- a. **Policy:** The proposed change is expected to result in improved collection of debts owed to the Department.
- b. **Administrative:** None expected.
- c. **Fiscal:** This proposal is expected to have a positive effect on the UI Trust Fund.

## **4. State and Federal Issues**

There are no known federal conformity issues with this proposal. The Department recommends that any changes to the unemployment insurance law be sent to the U.S. Department of Labor for conformity review.

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<sup>1</sup> "A conviction of a defendant for an offense involving the act giving rise to an order of restitution shall estop the defendant from denying the essential allegations of that offense in any subsequent Federal civil proceeding or State civil proceeding, to the extent consistent with State law, brought by the victim." 18 USC § 3664(l).

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**5. Proposed Effective/Applicability Date**

This proposal would be effective with the proposed changes in the UIAC Agreed Bill.

**FISCAL ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED LAW CHANGE**

Prepared by: Technical Services Section

**UI Trust Fund Impact:**

This proposal may have a positive but negligible impact to the UI Trust Fund based on increased overpayment collections.

**IT and Administrative Impact:**

This proposal is not expected to have any one-time IT or administrative impacts.

**Summary of Proposal:**

This law change proposes making criminal conviction judgments binding on criminal defendants for the purposes of civil proceedings that arise under Wisconsin unemployment law.

**UI Trust Fund Methodology:**

Without an unemployment administrative determination, the collection of unemployment debt based on the criminal conviction relies solely on court ordered restitution collection methods. This proposal will allow the Department to issue an administrative determination after the criminal conviction, which would then allow UI collections to use all mechanisms available to collect the debt. Though an uncommon scenario, this could result in faster unemployment debt recovery and a higher percentage of unemployment debt collection, resulting in a negligible but positive impact on the Trust Fund.

**IT and Administrative Impact Methodology:**

This proposal would not change the current practice with respect to nearly all cases determined and then referred for prosecution. This proposal is not expected to have any one-time IT or administrative impacts.