

**For Immediate Release**

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**Disability Rights Wisconsin Strongly Supports Governor Walker’s Juvenile Corrections Plan**

Disability Rights Wisconsin, the designated Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities, strongly supports Governor Walker’s announcement of a new direction for Wisconsin’s juvenile corrections and treatment systems. Most youth housed at the troubled Lincoln Hills and Copper Lakes correctional facilities are individuals with a significant history of trauma, disability, and mental illness.

“Disability Rights Wisconsin has long supported a smaller regionalized model that emphasizes treatment, rehabilitation, and education, including specialized educational services consistent with each child’s needs. We are pleased to learn that the Governor’s proposal is in alignment with these recommendations,” stated Managing Attorney Kit Kerschensteiner. Kerschensteiner has represented Disability Rights Wisconsin in her work with the Wisconsin Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.

Smaller, regional youth correctional and treatment facilities hold the promise of allowing Wisconsin to maintain staffing and safety, while providing better treatment options for youth, without resorting to the use of excessive physical force, solitary confinement, and limited educational engagement experienced in the current facilities.

While this is a promising direction, it is imperative that the state provide a sufficient investment to ensure youth have the services and supports they need for rehabilitation, including a full continuum of mental health and educational supports, including special education services. Funding for new facilities will not be meaningful unless it is accompanied by a new model of juvenile justice. More robust oversight will be essential to ensure an environment where youth are safe from abuse.

“This is an opportunity to change the culture of our juvenile justice system, and to promote greater family and community engagement to support these young people. We thank the Governor for his vision and look forward to working with the Departments of Corrections and Health Services to take full advantage of this opportunity to adopt a comprehensive model that employs best practices to improve long-term outcomes for youth with disabilities involved in Wisconsin’s correctional system,” emphasized Daniel Idzikowski, Executive Director.

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