



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Finance
April 4, 2019 – Hearing on the 2019-21 Biennial Budget Bill
By Secretary-designee Kevin A. Carr

Good afternoon Chairperson Darling, Chairperson Nygren, and members of the Joint Committee on Finance. I want to thank each of you for the invitation to come here today and discuss the Governor's proposed budget for the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC). With me today is DOC Assistant Deputy Secretary Shannon Carpenter and Dawn Woeshnick from our budget office.

Governor Evers' proposed a budget that is a step in the right direction for the Department of Corrections and it connects the dots that will help us make our communities safer and lower recidivism rates.

At the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, our vision is to achieve excellence in correctional practices while fostering safety for victims and communities. We believe every person, every family and every community matters.

Our mission is to:

- Protect the public, our staff and those in our charge;
- Provide opportunities for positive change and success;
- Promote, inform and educate others about our programs and successes;
- Partner and collaborate with community service providers and other criminal justice entities.

As you are already aware, the Department of Corrections is the state's largest agency, with approximately 10,000 employees who work at 37 facilities and 131 Community Supervision offices around the state. Each of those 10,000 employees is accountable to the citizens of Wisconsin and to each other to maintain and improve public safety. Ensuring our friends, neighbors, children and communities are safe from those who break the law is our number one priority. This priority is reflected in the budget proposal in front of you today. While the leadership at the Department has changed in the past few months, our commitment to public safety has not. And, it will not change under my watch. For me, this work is not about politics, it is about policy that works for all of Wisconsin.

Currently, DOC manages approximately 24,000 persons sentenced to confinement and approximately 66,000 persons on probation or parole at any given time. These two population groups mean the DOC is required to manage more individuals than the [populations of Wausau and Superior combined](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_municipalities_in_Wisconsin_by_population)¹. It is no secret that limited bed capacity, staff vacancy rates, and the growing number of individuals in our care have created challenges for our department. But, other states have faced the same challenges Wisconsin is facing today and have provided us with a roadmap to successfully navigate these issues. States like Texas and Minnesota have been able to implement smart criminal justice reforms by funding programs that prevent recidivism and providing rehabilitation and decreased sentences for nonviolent offenders. I believe Wisconsin can be successful in decreasing our prison population by looking at what other states have

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_municipalities_in_Wisconsin_by_population

successfully done in this area and creating a bi-partisan solution that works for Wisconsin.

But, before we can start to work on long term reforms, we have to deal with what is in front of us now. Governor Evers proposed in his Capital Budget a number of short-term solutions to address our growing prison population in the form of barracks at Taycheedah and Jackson. I want to repeat: short-term. I know we are all looking forward to having the Master Facilities Plan Report that will be completed later this year so that the Governor and you in the Legislature have a comprehensive picture of our statewide facility needs. I hope you will fund these short-term solutions while we work together to develop comprehensive criminal justice reform in the long term that will reduce correction expenditures to state taxpayers, produce better overall community outcomes and decrease our prison population.

On average, each year it costs tax payers \$33,000 per individual incarcerated and approximately \$3,200 for someone on community supervision. That means it is 10 times more expensive to keep a person in prison than to help them successfully transition into and function successfully within their communities. To give you a bit more context, the expense of keeping one individual incarcerated is nearly equivalent to the [median household income for a family in Sawyer or Iron Counties](#).²

Now, it might be that the general public only thinks of Corrections as running prisons. But, that could not be further from the truth. It is important to know how DOC *supports* the individuals in our care by providing basic daily needs, health care including mental health services, job training and reentry programs. We provide these basic daily needs and health care not only because we are required by law to do so but it is the right thing to do. We focus on mental health, job training and education because we know these actions lower recidivism rates and make communities safer.

Since January, I have become acutely aware of the health challenges facing those within our care. These individuals are often in a healthcare crisis long before they walk through our door. From severe dental needs to substance abuse disorders to mental health disorders to heart disease and even cancer. The DOC is also seeing a significant increase in incarcerated individuals over the age of 50. In 2000, a little over 6% of our adult population was 50 years or older. Today, nearly 20% of our population is more than 50 years old. The reason for this increase in older people in our care is two-fold. First, the overall population of Wisconsin aging. And, second, truth-in-sentencing keeps individuals incarcerated for longer terms. As with any aging population, health care needs AND costs increase. Since we are responsible *by law* for ensuring quality and timely health care, we must keep pace with the costs required by our aging population.

Governor Evers' budget recognizes these critical healthcare challenges, and the responsibility we all have to the individuals in our care. The Governor's capital budget includes necessary expansion to the health care facility at Stanley Correctional Institution and provides operating and staff funding for health care facilities at Racine, Columbia and Oshkosh as the construction projects from the previously passed budget near completion. These health services are desperately needed. If we do not provide adequate health care to those in our facilities I can guarantee you it will cost taxpayers more in the long run.

Individuals on community supervision also face significant challenges in addressing their basic health needs. That is why the Governor included funding to expand the successful "Opening Avenues to Reentry Success" or OARS program to have a presence in every county in the state. This program provides recently released individuals, who have a diagnosed mental illness, with comprehensive supports around affordable housing, jobs, as well as access to resources for medication and treatment. And, with 38% of our incarcerated male population having a diagnosed mental health condition, the expansion of OARS and programs like it address critical needs to keep communities safe and decrease criminalizing mental health issues.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wisconsin_locations_by_per_capita_income

The Governor also proposes reentry programs that benefit communities and businesses in our state. With programs like Windows to Work, the Technical Mobile Lab partnerships we have with Wisconsin's technical colleges, and the institution-based job centers, DOC is helping incarcerated individuals prepare for successful reentry into society AND working with local industries to fill jobs in high-demand fields.

Just last week, Governor Evers, Secretary-designee Frostman and I visited the job center at Oakhill Correctional Institution. At this center, which is operated in partnership with the Department of Workforce Development, we met large-scale employers and members of the workforce development board from southcentral Wisconsin. They are passionate about wanting to fill their staff vacancies with individuals transitioning out of our institutions or those on work release. We cannot meet these employer needs fast enough *and* these employers are proud to be partnering with DOC and DWD in supporting individuals on their paths to reentry.

From a public safety perspective, the strongest antidote to recidivism is the dignity associated with working hard, feeling valued and earning a livable wage.

DOC is actively working with employers around the state to fill their significant labor shortages in a number of key Wisconsin industries. The [Wisconsin Manufacturing and Commerce Foundation recently released a new report¹](#) on Wisconsin's workforce competitiveness. The report highlights stagnation in Wisconsin's population growth, and how this stagnation directly impedes job growth and the long-term strength of Wisconsin's economy. While organizations like WMC have suggested importing talent from other states, DOC is growing Wisconsin talent from the inside. We are working with public and private partnerships to train individuals while they are incarcerated, so that upon release, they are capable of positively contributing to the Wisconsin workforce and financially contributing to their communities and families.

Keeping your constituents safe AND supporting the individuals in our care is a tremendous responsibility. Our correctional officers, teachers, doctors, nurses and other staff are proud to do this work for the people of Wisconsin but they often work long hours and in challenging environments. Some of you have correctional facilities in your districts and I am certain you personally know individuals who are working hard in these facilities. These Corrections employees are your friends, neighbors and constituents. You know better than anyone the challenges they are facing and I share your concerns. I hope we can work together to ensure these hard working men and women can continue to financially support their families and are appropriately compensated, as Governor Evers has proposed. This would be just a step in the right direction to addressing our staffing shortage in all areas of the agency.

Governor Evers' budget proposal addresses immediate and pressing needs for the Department of Corrections, and begins to address some of the pressing criminal justice issues of our state. It truly is a Wisconsin budget for all.

Thank you for giving me this time today and I look forward to working with you and other members of the Legislature as the budget moves forward. If you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them now.

¹ Wisconsin Workforce Competitiveness Evaluation Future Wisconsin Project, WMC Foundation, February 2019
https://www.wmc.org/wp-content/uploads/Future-WI-Report_FINAL.pdf