



DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS
JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

July 14, 2017

Secretary Jon Litscher
Wisconsin Department of Corrections
3099 E. Washington Ave
Madison, WI 53704

Secretary Litscher,

We are writing today to ask you to file a 13.10 request with the co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Finance seeking release of state funds to make the improvements recommended already by the Joint Committee on Finance in the state budget for juvenile corrections in Wisconsin. In absence of the passage of a state budget, we believe action needs to be taken now by the Department of Corrections to implement changes that are desperately needed at our juvenile correctional facilities; the 2017-2019 budget recommendations are needed now. While we still believe more improvements are needed, like full federal law compliance, this budget contains needed first steps.

Along with the court ordered changes at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake, the staffing increases included in 2017-2019 state budget at these facilities in mental health and counselors can only serve to improve the continued crisis at our facilities. The Legislature has failed to meet the July 1 budget deadline, and because of that, positions are not posted, policies are not changed, and program expansions are stalled. While Governor Walker and Legislative Republicans work to resolve their budget impasse, we are asking you to seek remedy outside of the budget process for the juvenile corrections policies contained in the budget.

Moving all children under 18 in our prison system into a juvenile facility is essential for compliance with federal prison rape law and is simply a better policy. Improving staffing levels at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake is probably the most essential component of the juvenile corrections budget and should be enacted now. While our preference is full compliance of federal PREA law, even moving in the right direction will likely improve conditions at our current juvenile facilities. Also essential is the new mental health unit at Copper Lake. Finally, having medical personnel administering medication at our juvenile facilities cannot wait for infighting and debate on other topics. Medication mistakes have been the subject of several news accounts of dangerous errors at the Lincoln Hills facility. Since these measures have already been approved by the Joint Committee on Finance, we ask that you request for these funds to be released before the budget is passed.

We appreciate that the Department of Corrections is working on a daily basis to improve outcomes at Lincoln Hills. We wish there was more emphasis from Governor Walker on the facility. Given the urgency of the situation, these measures need to be enacted now so improvements can be made, staffing can be completed and compliance with court orders can be supported. We hope you will file a 13.10 request with the co-chairs and know you have our support in these endeavors of improvement.

Sincerely,



JON ERPENBACH
State Senator
27th District



GORDON HINTZ
State Representative
54th District



LENA TAYLOR
State Senator
4th District



KATRINA SHANKLAND
State Representative
71st District