



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Milwaukee County

CHRIS ABELE • COUNTY EXECUTIVE

July 29, 2016

Mr. Jon E. Litscher, Secretary
State of Wisconsin
Department of Corrections
3099 E Washington Avenue
PO Box 7925
Madison, WI 53707-7925

Dear Secretary Litscher:

As governmental entities, we have an important role in ensuring the safety and well-being of youth in our care as well as the community. As such, it is incumbent upon us to act with great urgency to respond to immediate concerns, while at the same time take deliberate action to accelerate juvenile justice system reform in our state. To that end, we believe it is necessary to begin to plan for a redesigned system that includes a regional model of small, safe, and treatment-oriented facilities that will replace the current model of large congregate care juvenile correctional facilities. We believe it is time for the Department of Corrections to demonstrate that efforts are taking place to advance the new model.

To be sure, we all face significant challenges. As you are aware, Milwaukee County has been experiencing overcrowding in our juvenile detention center since the crisis surfaced at Lincoln Hills. Since the beginning of the year we have exceeded the rated capacity of 120 youth in our detention center with great frequency. Despite our daily efforts to consider with system stakeholders all options to reduce the census, the overcrowding situation has not been ameliorated. We have been over capacity for the majority of the month in June and July, with as many as 13 young people sleeping on mattresses in boats on the floor of the pod. This trend is not sustainable and compromises safety standards. While many factors have contributed to this situation, the troubles at Lincoln Hills has exacerbated the problem.

Ultimately, we need the Department of Corrections to be prepared for sweeping reforms by the time the biennial budget is proposed. There is much that needs to be done in order for the 2017-2019 budget to encompass all that is necessary to enact such reforms. We feel it is incumbent upon you as Secretary to lead the necessary change process with transparency and inclusion of all system stakeholders. As a result, we feel it is imperative that:

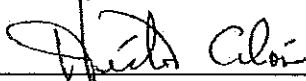
- Statewide listening sessions to solicit feedback from youth, parents, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, victims of juvenile crime, county juvenile justice officials, private providers, and others be convened immediately. We believe there is a strong interest among these stakeholders in assuring that youth receive effective treatment, education and rehabilitative services close to home.
- A statewide forum of system stakeholders be convened by September 30, 2016. National experts on effective juvenile correctional programs should be invited to present on successful reform efforts that have occurred in other states.
- By October 1, 2016, the Department of Corrections establishes a steering committee consisting of the stakeholders described above with the purpose of advising and assisting the Department's efforts at reform.
- By January 31, 2017, the Department identify four to six regions in the state where regional juvenile correctional facilities should be located.
- By April 30, 2017 that each region have a plan that outlines a continuum of treatment and supervision services that extends from diversion services through aftercare services. It is imperative that DOC work with DCF, county officials in each region, system stakeholders, and providers in developing this continuum.
- The 2017-2019 budget reflect the development of at least two regional juvenile correctional facilities to serve as pilots for the remaining regions and that one of the pilot regions should include Milwaukee County.

We are deeply committed to seeing that proper measures are taken to ensure that our state is providing the most humane and effective services for juvenile offenders who are in need of restrictive custodial care. We will continue to call on our legislators, WCHSA, WCA, and all other stakeholder groups to join us in this effort. We urge the Department of Corrections to join forces with us and other partners to work collectively for a cost-effective model that is in line with evidence-based practices and results in improved youth outcomes and public safety.

In the meanwhile, this community needs to be assured that the youth placed in state juvenile correctional facilities are safe and continue to receive appropriate care and treatment they need to be successful. Open lines of communication and readily available information are imperative.

Wisconsin is at a critical juncture and it is more important than ever that we work together in partnership to redesign the system that ultimately will keep youth safe in our community. We cannot afford to wait. Please let us know what you need from us to help drive the vision forward.

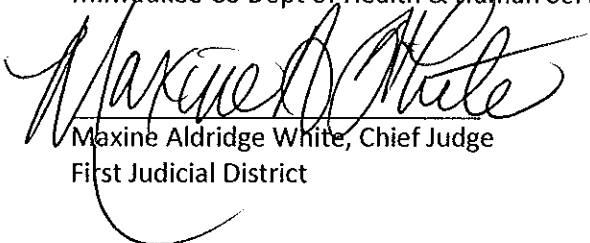
Sincerely,



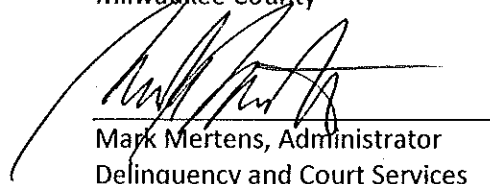
Héctor Colón, Director
Milwaukee Co Dept of Health & Human Services



Chris Abele, County Executive
Milwaukee County



Maxine Aldridge White, Chief Judge
First Judicial District



Mark Mertens, Administrator
Delinquency and Court Services

cc: Chairman Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor Supreme Moore Omokunde, Milwaukee County Board, Chair of Health and Human Needs Committee
Supervisor Sequanna Taylor, Milwaukee County Board, Vice Chair of the Health and Human Needs Committee