Corrections Reform Measures Proposed To Improve Public Safety

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A high-profile investigation into claims of child abuse at the Lincoln Hills Juvenile Detention Center and serious assaults on correctional officers this year at Green Bay, Racine, Columbia and other correctional facilities across Wisconsin have prompted Democratic legislators to take action.

MADISON - Amid growing concerns with the rise in assaults at Wisconsin's correctional facilities, Democratic legislators here are urging immediate action to strengthen worker protections and improve public safety.

A high-profile investigation is currently looking into claims of child abuse and assaults at the Lincoln Hills Juvenile Detention Center. In addition, serious assaults on correctional officers have been documented this year at Green Bay, Racine, Columbia and other correctional facilities across Wisconsin.

While Republican leaders have known about these serious safety concerns for more than a year, conditions have deteriorated as a result of additional state budget cuts and worsening staff shortages.

In an effort to improve safety in correctional facilities, Sen. **Jon Erpenbach** (D-Middleton), Sen. **Dave Hansen**
(D-Green Bay) and several Assembly Democrats are putting forward a package of legislative proposals. The bills aim to improve worker training, limit the use of forced overtime, increase workplace safety, strengthen reporting requirements and ensure appropriate staffing levels for first responders.



“Safety in our Department of Corrections institutions in not a new issue. The staffing shortages that were a direct result of Governor Walker’s Act 10 have never been resolved by the administration or the DOC. The burden for staffing shortages continues to fall solely on the backs of officers working in our institutions. They are the ones who have to live with more consecutive days of overtime because of inadequate staffing levels,” **said Senator Erpenbach** in a statement released this morning.



“Safety within our corrections institutions should be a top priority in light of the growing number of incidents we have seen take place, in large part due to the inability of Corrections officials to recruit, properly train and retain staff,” **said Senator Hansen**, noting that 500 positions are currently unfilled in the department putting public safety at risk. “As a result we are asking fewer officers to take on more shifts and more responsibility to the point that it is putting their safety at risk.”

Hansen has announced he will join Senator Erpenbach and corrections officers at a press conference at the Brown County Courthouse at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, January 7th to discuss the growing crisis in Corrections and to announce his support for the package of bills.

Currently seeking co-sponsors, Erpenbach and other authors of the proposals expect introduction of the bills next week. To receive a copy of the draft legislation, contact Senator Erpenbach's office at sen.erpenbach@legislwi.gov or 608-266-6670.



As part of the Corrections Reform package, Senate Democratic Leader **Jennifer Shilling** (D-La Crosse) and Rep.
Dianne Hesselbein
(D-Middleton) are introducing the Correctional Officer Workplace Safety Bill (LRB 4225). The proposal will restore the right of correctional officers to collectively bargain over workplace safety issues.

“The lack of urgency by Gov. Walker’s administration and the Republican majority to address complaints of child abuse and assaults in our correctional facilities is appalling,” **said Sen. Shilling** . “In the past two months, serious assaults and nearly-fatal suicide attempts have shocked families and communities who had been told not to worry about safety concerns in our correctional facilities. Wisconsin children, families and public safety officers can’t afford to continue waiting for action. It’s time to address the serious safety issues in our correctional facilities before this dangerous situation spirals further out of control.”

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