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Who Would Oppose Juvenile Corrections Reform?

(Madison, WI) Representative Michael Schraa (R-Oshkosh) wonders why anyone would oppose reforming our juvenile corrections system. Apparently, this is yet another bill that will die in the Senate.

As soon as Governor Walker released his plan to close Lincoln Hills and replace it with smaller, more local facilities, legislators from both houses and both parties rolled up their sleeves and got to work on a county-based solution for most of the youth. This was combined with the Governor's proposal, resulting in Assembly Bill 953, which was passed unanimously by the Assembly last month.

Unfortunately, it seems to have become a political football, with the troubled youth of Wisconsin being tossed about for political points. The Senate amendment would close Lincoln Hills without providing a place for those youth to go. The Assembly has finished its work, so it would not even be able to consider the Senate amendment. Meanwhile, the Governor wants to close Lincoln Hills, but needs the legislature to fund appropriate alternative facilities.

There is a perception that the bill was rushed, and so it must be flawed. Government can actually move quickly and effectively on occasion, and this was one of those occasions. Agencies and stakeholders put in many hours and late nights to come to a consensus. Many details were left up to the committees precisely because they need more careful consideration.

Make no mistake. Closing Lincoln Hills without the rest of the bill is recklessly irresponsible. In fact, a substitute amendment is a death sentence for the bill and for juvenile corrections reform by 2021.

The Assembly was able to put aside political differences for the good of the troubled youth of the state. We call on the Senate to do the same. Why can't we just come together to do what's right for the troubled youth of Wisconsin?

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