WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. Box 7882 - Madison, WI 53707

March 2016

Senator Rob Cowles, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Audit
118 South, State Capitol

Representative Samantha Kerkman, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Audit
318 North, State Capitol

Dear Senator Cowles and Representative Kerkman,

We, the undersigned, write today to request that you schedule a public hearing at which the Joint Legislative Audit Committee may consider directing the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) to conduct an audit of the Department of Corrections.

There is no doubt the department is experiencing significant problems related to staff shortages and forced overtime. Current inmate populations are 130 percent of capacity which, coupled with the staffing issues, creates a very dangerous situation. Some of us have been contacted by Corrections staff who fear retaliation from senior officials for reporting their concerns to legislators. All of this contributes to an exodus of staff in both the institutions and the agency.

Treatment of inmates has dominated the news with reports about the horrific treatment of juveniles under the custody of the Corrections at the facility in Lincoln Hills. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has reportedly taken over leadership of an investigation at Lincoln Hills. Counties like Milwaukee and Racine are removing juveniles from Lincoln Hills and this puts the entire facility existence in question.

Secretary Wall's resignation leaves many questions unanswered. Some cautiously welcomed the appointment of the new Secretary, Jon Litscher, as he has experience leading the department under then Governor Thompson. However, much has changed since Secretary Litscher's last time at the helm and an audit of Corrections could help inform the new Secretary.

An audit that would include any, if not all, of the following important issues would provide accurate, independent information from the LAB that would enable us to make evidence-based decisions about what changes are needed within Corrections:

- security and staffing,
- training of staff,
- overtime policies,
- turnover, assaults on staff in adult correctional facilities and the overall safety of staff,
- safety and care of juvenile inmates,
- human resources policies and practices.

This month both the Senate and Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution 90, which recognized the quality, professional, nonpartisan work conduced the LAB for the past 50 years. We simply must apply the expertise of the Bureau to assess the complicated issues that have occurred within Corrections and, most importantly, help the new Secretary, the administration and the Legislature determine how best to chart a path forward to improve management of this department. The recommendations from the respected LB would provide an independent assessment that would provide valuable to the new secretary.

While we urge you to approve an audit of these corrections issues, we are already encouraging those with information about specific concerns at Corrections to contact the LAB Hotline at 1-877-FRAUD-17. As you know, the Bureau is required by law to protect the identity of the caller and will investigate the tips it receives.

Thank you and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Sen. Kathleen Vinehout
31st Senate District

Sen. Janet Bewley
25th Senate District

Rep. Melissa Sargent
48th Assembly District

Rep. Terese Berceau
77th Assembly District

Sen. Jennifer Shilling
32nd Senate District

Sen. Jon Erpenbach
27th Senate District

Sen. Mark Miller
16th Senate District

Sen. Dave Hansen
30th Senate District

Sen. Janis Ringhand
15th Senate District

Sen. Bob Wirch
22 Senate District

Sen. Chris Larson
7th Senate District

Sen. Nikiya Harris-Dodd
6th Senate District

Sen. Tim Carpenter
3rd Senate District

Sen. Lena Taylor
4th Senate District

Rep. Mandela Barnes
11th Assembly District

Rep. Christine Sinicki
20th Assembly District

Rep. Dianne Hesselbein
79th Assembly District

Rep. Evan Goyke
18th Assembly District

Rep. Dana Wachs
91st Assembly District

Rep. Andy Jorgenson
43rd Assembly District

Rep. Cory Mason
66th Assembly District

Rep. David Bowen
10th Assembly District

Sen. Julie Lassa
24th Senate District

Rep. Peter Barca
64th Assembly District

Rep. Nick Milroy
73rd Assembly District

Rep. Chris Danou
92nd Assembly District

Rep. Lisa Subeck
57th Assembly District

Rep. Leon Young
16th Assembly District

Rep. Mark Spreitzer
45th Assembly District

Rep. Sondy Pope
80th Assembly District

Rep. Gordon Hintz
54th Assembly District

Rep. Eric Genrich
90th Assembly District

Rep. Katrina Shankland
71st Assembly District

Rep. Jill Billings
95th Assembly District

Rep. LaTonya Johnson
17th Assembly District

Rep. Tod Ohnstad
65th Assembly District

Rep. Daniel Riemer
7th Assembly District

Rep. Robb Kahl
47th Assembly District

Rep. Deb Kolste
47th Assembly District

Rep. JoCasta Zamarripa
8th Assembly District

Rep. Dave Considine
81st Assembly District

Rep. Gary Hebl
46th Assembly District

Rep. Chris Taylor
76th Assembly District

Rep. Josh Zepnick
9th Assembly District