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STATE SENATE FUNDS LINCOLN HILLS REPLACEMENT Closure of Lincoln Hills Now in Assembly Hands

MADISON – Today, the Wisconsin State Senate unanimously voted to fund a replacement for the troubled Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake youth correctional facilities. The bill now moves to the Wisconsin Assembly for approval. If the Assembly does not approve the funding before the end of the Legislative session, the closure of Lincoln Hills will be put off at least another year.

“We’ve seen what has occurred in the four years since we voted to close Lincoln Hills. Both Lincoln Hills and our streets and neighborhoods are more dangerous,” said Senator Van Wanggaard (R-Racine) the bill author. “Dangerous juvenile felons are being put into “feel-good” programs and let back out on the streets instead of being sent to a correctional facility. The staff at Lincoln Hills are defending themselves with one arm tied behind their back. We need to move forward – now – before more damage occurs.”

Four years ago, the Wisconsin Legislature unanimously decided on a new form of juvenile corrections. This bipartisan effort was led by Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, bringing everyone to the table to create the “Wisconsin model” of juvenile justice. Unfortunately, Governor Tony Evers ignored the study committee facility location recommendations, and unilaterally decided to place new juvenile prisons outside of the recommendations, and in areas with strong local opposition. This caused the Legislature to reject Evers’ choice of locations. There has been little to no movement by anyone to replace Lincoln Hills since.

“The decision to move forward and close Lincoln Hills was the easy part,” said Wanggaard. “When we decided to close Lincoln Hills four years ago, we simply didn’t fund it enough.

“Senate Bill 520 still requires Joint Finance Committee approval over siting of the youth facilities, just like 2017 Act 185 did,” Wanggaard continued. “If Governor Evers screws up the site again, the Legislature can reject it again. But it’s way past time to fund the project. And waiting another year is only going to make it more expensive. The Assembly should pass this bill this week.”

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