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August 7, 2024 608-266-1832

**STAFF & INMATES FEArFUL, CONDEMN UNSAFE WORKING ENVIRoNMENT, QUESTION CONSENT dECREE**

Yesterday, the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety held a 7 ½ hour informational hearing in Merrill to hear from Department of Corrections (DOC) officials, and current and former Lincoln Hills staff and family members about conditions at the embattled Lincoln Hills School. The hearing was scheduled following the attack on and killing off youth counselor Cory Proulx in June.

Committee members heard a host of concerns in testimony including:

* Staff and inmates feeling unsafe
* Staff fearing retaliation for speaking up
* A one-size-fits all approach to discipline due to the consent decree
* Alleged cover-ups of attacks and crimes
* Body camera footage mysteriously disappearing or inaccessible

“I’m not going to sit here and say I have all the answers, and now we have even more questions. Something has to change at Lincoln Hills,” said Committee Chairman Van Wanggaard (R-Racine). “It’s clear the staff cares about the youth at Lincoln Hills, and they are attempting to do their best. But they’re handcuffed by the Administration and the consent decree. The stories we heard were scary and heartbreaking at times. Staff and inmates feel unsafe, fear retaliation for speaking up, and are confused by consent decree rules that don’t make sense, or in the words of one speaker, ‘make Lincoln Hills sense.’”

“Staff assaults have increased, despite a decreasing population and the implementation of ‘evidence-based’ policies,” Wanggaard continued. “Nearly everyone said OC (pepper) spray may or may not be the answer, but staff said in some instances, it doesn’t have any other options available either.”

“The consent decree seems to be a theoretical exercise that doesn’t translate to the real world,” said Wanggard. “The testimony made it clear - since the consent decree, DOC has lost control of Lincoln Hills. The consent decree was supposed to make Lincoln Hills safer for staffers and inmates, but the statistics indicate just the opposite.”

“Senator Felzkowski said it best, Lincoln Hills is failing both our staff and the kids that are housed there,” Wanggaard said. “As another speaker put it, kids are coming out of Lincoln Hills charged with more crimes than they went in with. What are we doing? We just are turning juvenile criminals into adult ones. We can’t continue juvenile corrections this same way at a new location and expect different results. It will continue to be a recipe for disaster.”

The state willingly entered into a consent decree with the ACLU and US District Court in Madison following a lawsuit alleging abuse at Lincoln Hills in 2018. The consent decree places limits on when and what types of behavior modification tools can be used by Lincoln Hills staff. It is regularly monitored by a court-appointed official. In the monitor’s most recent report, Lincoln Hills was in “substantial compliance” with 43 of 50 requirements.