

**Testimony of Department of Corrections Secretary Gary Hamblin  
Joint Committee on Finance  
March 30, 2011**

Good afternoon Chairperson Darling, Chairperson Vos, and members of the Joint Finance Committee. I want to thank each of you for the invitation to come here and discuss the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Corrections.

It's an honor to serve as Secretary and I have learned much about Corrections and its workforce in the past three months. I am deeply impressed by the professionalism of our staff and by their dedication to our public safety mission. Throughout the budget repair bill process, they have continued to perform their duties at the highest level and for that I would like to publicly thank them.

In his biennial budget, Governor Walker has set a clear direction for corrections and criminal justice in Wisconsin -- one that enhances safety for citizens across the state and allows Corrections to continue to pursue the positive trend we are seeing in our decreasing prison population.

Recently, for the first time in the history of the Department, the number of adult inmates in our institutions has begun to go down. The decrease has been relatively small and has not been sustained for a long period of time. However, I am confident that with the tools the Governor has given us in this budget we can continue to work with our community criminal justice partners to further reduce repeat crime and lower the number of inmates returning to prison. By doing that, we can reduce the number of new crime victims while holding down costs.

As the largest Cabinet-level agency in the state, Corrections is one of the biggest users of GPR dollars. And while I usually like to be near the top of some lists -- this particular standing isn't one of them. So I want to assure you that at Corrections we plan to continue to find ways to save tax dollars while maximizing the dollars we get to their fullest extent.

Our hope is that the current downward trend in the prison population continues. Projecting a conservative monthly decrease of point one six percent (.16%) in male inmates and a point zero five percent (.05%) drop in female inmates, our corresponding budgeted costs should fall by \$22.7 million in FY12 and nearly \$30 million in FY13, based on the best estimates available at this time.

We don't yet know the exact reasons for this downward trend in the prison population. An aging population and better local programs may be playing a role. However, I believe a key factor in the trend is our continued focus on reentry. At Corrections, that is the ongoing emphasis to help offenders prepare themselves to be successful after release back into their communities -- and 97% of our population does get released.

Under the Governor's budget, Corrections will be able to strengthen the tools we need to better identify an offender's risk to the public, along with education, treatment or other programming needs. We also will be able to target the most successful programs at motivated offenders. By focusing on these two things, I am confident that the Department working with the local law enforcement and the courts can not only hold down the recidivism rate, but also explore new safe ways to prevent some from coming into prison in the first place, thus holding down incarceration costs.

Another population that is decreasing is the juveniles at our three secure institutions. That youth population has plummeted over the last several years due to a number of factors, including fewer juvenile arrests and more court-ordered placements of juveniles in less expensive, community-based programs. Currently, our three juvenile institutions are operating at 20 to 30 percent of capacity; our girls' school has just 20 students. This trend has left our Division of Juvenile Corrections unable to collect enough program revenue from counties to cover overhead costs, and that has led to a \$21 million deficit accumulated over the last ten years.

That is why under the Governor's budget we are taking swift action to permanently cut costs and eliminate the red ink. By July 1<sup>st</sup>, we will close two institutions, Ethan Allen School for boys in Wales and Southern Oaks Girls School in Union Grove. Operations, including a separate girls' school named Copper Lake School, will be consolidated at the Lincoln Hills School site in Lincoln County. This move allows the DOC to continue to provide quality education and treatment for our state youth while getting our expenditures in line with our revenue. **The consolidation will save \$23 million a year in operating costs, erase our debt in ten years, and keep the daily rate to house youth affordable for counties.**

Other major DOC initiatives in the Governor's budget support public safety improvements from the restoration of Truth in Sentencing and enforcement of tougher penalties for drunk driving to the expansion of notification services for crime victims at the county level.

Under the biennial budget, a set of complicated sentencing reforms in 2009 Wisconsin Act 28 is repealed. The goal of these reforms was to save money by releasing offenders back into the community before the completion of their prison sentence. But, with only 479 offenders released under the reforms, this failed experiment has produced little or no savings and has been confusing to crime victims and the public. By restoring Truth in Sentencing the budget puts public safety first and moves the decision to release an offender from a third-party back to the sentencing court -- where it belongs.

Act 100 passed during the last legislative session with bi-partisan support. It toughens the penalties for drunk driving, including allowing probation for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> time OWI offenders. Already, 264 people have been put on probation for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> offenses by the court since the law took effect nine months ago, with half of those coming on to probation within the past 60 days. To properly supervise these new offenders, the Governor's budget funds the conversion of 27.6 Limited Term Employees (LTEs) to permanent Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) employees at our 24/7 Electronic Monitoring Center. These full time employees are needed to provide consistent and effective monitoring of this new, growing pool of OWI offenders and the alcohol detection devices they are required to use as part of their enhanced supervision. This conversion to stable permanent positions allows the Department to ensure these new OWI offenders are properly monitored and immediately held accountable for any violations while assuring they are successful in treatment.

Finally, I am extremely pleased to outline a budget item that expands a critical crime victim service -- and could possibly save lives. The Governor has set aside \$1.2 million dollars to pay the annual cost for all 72 counties to operate Wisconsin's Victim Information and Notification Everyday or VINE. VINE gives crime victims, other state residents and law enforcement valuable and timely time information about the location or custody status of anyone being held at a county jail. In

cooperation with county Sheriffs, DOC has been a leader in getting VINE implemented; as of mid-March, 90% of counties have activated VINE or are in the process of doing so. Now those efforts can spread statewide thanks to the permanent funding of VINE in the Governor's budget. Under it, a non-taxpayer, criminal justice information fee covers the cost of operating VINE so all county jails can run it.

In addition, the funding allows VINE to expand its services. By the end of FY12, VINE will start providing real time information on when a protective order, such as a temporary restraining order, has been served. Serving someone with a protective order often is an extremely dangerous time for petitioners and this additional information will let concerned citizens protect themselves better against potential harm. In 2009, 52 people in Wisconsin were murdered in a record number of deadly domestic violence incidents. With the Governor's budget allocation for VINE, services can expand and improve to reach more victims of domestic violence and other residents as well as provide important information to law enforcement investigators.

Public safety continues to be, as it has always been, the number one priority of the Department of Corrections. Wisconsin residents expect that their government will do everything in its power to protect them and reduce crime. They also expect us to be careful about spending their hard - earned tax dollars. Under Governor Walker's budget, the DOC does both. We share in the budget pain by tightening our belt – but also receive support for the important initiatives I outlined for you today. The budget plan gives DOC the tools it needs to both protect citizens **and** help offenders, whose success back in their communities is the key to cutting crime and the high cost of incarceration.

Thank you for giving me this time today and I look forward to working with you and other members of the Legislature as the budget moves forward. If you have any questions, I'll do my best now to answer them.

