



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

October 16, 2017

The Honorable James D. Peterson
Chief Judge, Western District of Wisconsin
United States Court House
120 N. Henry St., Rm. 320
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Judge Peterson,

Recently, you imposed a new agreement for managing the Lincoln Hills School (LHS) youth correctional facility in Irma as a result of a suit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). We are writing to urge you to reverse your decision because the order you placed on the Department of Corrections (DOC) is not working.

The DOC, under the leadership of Secretary Litscher, is making a good faith effort to implement your Order. Based on correspondence from staff at LHS—please see the attached—your Order is not working. Your Order has emboldened some youth offenders to the point they are attacking both staff and other youth. We presume that is not your intention.

LHS has a long, proud history of rehabilitating youthful offenders. The youth housed at LHS have been given multiple opportunities to live by societal norms and only enter LHS as a result of their actions. As Senator Tiffany stated while debating correctional funding on the Joint Finance Committee, the youth at LHS are not “angels”. However, the staff at LHS have always taken great pride in doing everything possible to get the youth on the right track so they can be participating members of civil society.

Those efforts continue, but your Order has not only jeopardized staff safety but it is jeopardizing the safety of youth in LHS who are non-violent. Unfortunately, your order has emboldened violent offenders to the detriment of those seeking to serve their time and return to civil society.

There are some like the ACLU whose goal is the closure of LHS. We are assuming that is not your intent. However, your Order unnecessarily aids in making LHS a political football for some whose goal has nothing to do with youth rehabilitation but the closure of an institution that has served an important purpose for the people of Wisconsin.

Finally, you have mentioned frequently the constitutional rights youth have at LHS. We agree they have important constitutional protections but what are you going to do about the constitutional rights of the dedicated public servants at LHS when they are beaten and harassed by youth who know a judge will take their side?

We hope that you will reconsider the terms and conditions set forth in your Order and amend it so that the youth counselors and other staff at Lincoln Hills can work in an environment that is safe for both staff and those housed at the facility.

Sincerely,

Tom Tiffany
Wisconsin State Senator
12th Senate District

Mary Felzkowski
Wisconsin State Assembly
35th Assembly District