



# WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

---

**Joint Legislative Audit Committee  
Thursday, April 20, 2023  
Kevin A. Carr, DOC Secretary  
LAB Community Corrections Report**

Good Afternoon Chairmen Wimberger, Wittke and members of the committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Legislative Audit Bureau's summary and observations of our Division of Community Corrections. I'm sure you've all read the 126-page report by now, and I'm eager to begin a dialogue on the findings. This report took 14 months to complete and the coordination and efforts of many individuals. I want to thank everyone involved in these efforts, especially the staff of Legislative Audit Bureau and my own team, who worked tirelessly to ensure we were as transparent and helpful in this process as possible.

As the leader of the Department of Corrections and as a public servant, I understand the value of feedback. My philosophy on audits are that they can be great tools for improvement when used correctly. I employed a similar philosophy working with our court-appointed, independent monitor at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools, who is tasked with tracking progress in our youth facilities, and providing feedback to our agency for improvement. We've done our best during that process to remain open and transparent, and in doing so, we've been able to make a number of changes rooted in research and evidence to improve our youth facilities. From that experience, Wisconsin now stands as a leader in our nation in youth justice practices.

The process to get where we are with Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools took bipartisan support and a shared commitment to evidenced-based approaches. My hope is that we can use a similar approach in reviewing the findings in the Community Corrections Program report.

After almost 40 years in Law Enforcement, protecting the public has always been and will continue to be my first priority. I believe that a collaborative, bi-partisan approach, based on established best practices is critical to our success in reducing crime, reducing costs and producing better outcomes.

Before we dive in, I'd like to discuss a few high-level thoughts I had while reviewing the report that I hope can be used as a jumping off point for our discussion today, and in the future:

- The Department of Corrections is a large and complex agency, and every person in our state is impacted by what we do. While the Division of Community Corrections is only a part of the larger agency, I believe this audit has highlighted just how integral a role our probation and parole agents, and every staff within the division, play in public safety. With vacancy rates increasing and staff dissatisfaction with compensation, I think we can all agree our staff have a tough job and deserve better.

- When working with a population of more than 60,000 justice involved individuals, our agency knows we can never fully address every need or eliminate all risk. I've worked in law enforcement most of my life, and I try to focus on continual improvement to measure success. This report highlighted some of the areas we can improve, and our agency remains committed to doing the work.
- Victim impact must always be a priority in our work. Some of the individuals we supervise have engaged in harmful behavior that has lasting effects on their victims and our communities. It's important not to minimize their actions. Accountability is an important aspect of justice. Most people can change, but they may need time, resources and support to do so. When our agency provides them with these tools, and people engage in positive behavior, we are increasing public safety while also providing some level of justice to victims of crime.
- According to the National Institute of Corrections, Evidence-based Practices are the objective, balanced and responsible use of current research and best available data to guide policy and practice decisions, such that outcomes for consumers are improved.

This administration did not start the practice of modifying its evidence-based response to violations. This has been an ongoing, non-partisan effort, using nationally accepted research from the National Institute of Corrections, Council of State Governments, the Center for Effective Public Policy, as well as a number of other nationally recognized entities prior to January 2019. According to a 2019 article from Pew Charitable Trust, over 30 states have implemented "policies to reduce the number of people in prison for technical violations while protecting public safety" through justice reinvestment efforts.

In 2013, former State Representative John Nygren introduced Assembly Bill 702, to allow the Department of Corrections to develop a system of short-term sanctions for individuals who violate conditions of extended supervision, parole and probation using "evidenced-based decision-making framework". In his testimony dated February 6, 2014, Representative Nygren noted the "promising results" seen in other states and stated, "The goal is to keep low-risk, non-violent offenders with alcohol and drug treatment needs in the community. It will minimize the impact on a person and their family that is expected to reintegrate into the community and become a functional member of society while protecting the public."

Our agency has continued the work of previous administrations with the same goals in mind, and using the same independent evidence and research.

- Change is difficult, and we can see by a number of the opinions and responses of our staff and sheriffs in the report, that not everyone has embraced some of the recent changes made. But change is sometimes necessary and can be accomplished without undermining safety or accountability.
- Transparency and process improvement were a key component of our process to modify evidenced-based response to violations. Whenever our agency is able to engage in process improvement emanating from staff, clients and advocacy groups, we do so. We held internal and external town halls prior to any changes being made, with over 500 stakeholders in attendance. These invited stakeholders included elected officials, law enforcement, District Attorneys, system practitioners and the general public. We used the feedback of our staff and stakeholders to further enhance our policies and ensure the research aligned with best-practices. In addition to taking live questions during the town hall, our agency reviewed and answered 96 questions that came in. We posted each question and a response on our public website PRIOR to finalizing any policy changes.

As a former law enforcement officer, I value public safety above all else, and every decision I make as Secretary is through that lens and I know from my discussions with the Governor, he feels the same way. My hope is we all make a commitment to find common ground, rooted in nationally recognized evidence-based practices and research to make Wisconsin a leader in community corrections practices and meet the unique needs of the clients we serve.

While we noted our concerns in our response to the Legislative Audit Bureau, those responses were intended to provide an agency explanation of the specific issues raised by the Legislative Audit Bureau from agency subject matter experts with years of experience in this field, as well as the opinion of our office of Legal Counsel.

The Legislative Audit Bureau made 27 recommendations to improve program administration, and we agree with most of those recommendations and are open to discussion, or willing to provide an explanation, regarding the others. I believe some of the issues outlined in the report are simply due to misunderstanding of how our complex agency operates and tracks progress. I look forward to addressing some of those points as we respond to the Audit Bureau's recommendations now and in the future.

Thank you for your time and I will now open it up to questions.