



Central Office

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April 16, 2024

Representative Kelly Moller
Chair, Public Safety Policy and Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
509 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Moller:

I am writing to express my gratitude for your leadership on the public safety and corrections supplemental budget bill, reflected in your amendment to House File 5216. The operations adjustment requested by the Department of Corrections (DOC) is a significant ask and the inclusion of it in your bill reflects a commitment to supporting the work of the DOC to transform lives for a safer Minnesota.

The amendment provides the DOC with critical funding to cover a deficiency created by historic, bargained-for compensation increases for corrections staff. I want to be clear about the impact this funding has on core operations of the DOC – specifically through stabilizing our workforce. Challenges arising out of the DOC’s recent staffing crisis have included routine forced overtime shifts and lockdowns of living units, lost rehabilitative programming opportunities, concerns for the safety of staff and the incarcerated population, and extraordinary staff burnout. Over the last several years, the DOC has had vacancy rates at some facilities - like Stillwater and Oak Park Heights – as high as 30%. We have made enormous efforts to recruit and retain individuals to work at the DOC and, through these efforts, we have hired an unprecedented number of corrections officers. However, due to wages that were not competitive, particularly for such challenging jobs, we have retained less than half of them.

The negotiated contracts agreed upon last summer have changed the landscape for the DOC. Today, a career in state corrections is competitive with county jails and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. We can now report that there are currently 157 officers in training, and we will soon be at a 97% staffing level across all facilities.

Again, thank you for your leadership investing in Minnesota’s corrections system. When over 95% of those in Minnesota’s prisons return to communities across the state, our collective safety depends upon their success. Your support of our operating adjustment helps to ensure this work is successful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Schnell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Schnell
Commissioner, Department of Corrections