

March 27, 2023

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 and support for your amendment to the public safety omnibus budget bill, House File 2890. Your bill represents a historic and much needed investment in Minnesota's corrections system along with strong leadership on gun violence prevention and other critical criminal justice reform measures. The Department of Corrections shares your goal of creating a safer Minnesota, and state investments in what works is more critical than ever. House File 2890 does just that.

The investments and policy included in your amendment recognizes that public safety and transformation cannot be achieved through enforcement and prosecution only. Inclusion of the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act creates a long-term, comprehensive, and evidence-based approach to preventing future crime by incentivizing rehabilitation and improve community reentry. The policy and investments proposed in your amendment provide a range of tools and resources to allow for community, local, and state government collaboration to produce outcomes to provide effective accountability and support.

Through your leadership, House File 2980 provides the DOC with critically needed base funding while investing in transformational services to ensure those who are incarcerated return to their communities successfully. Additionally, it responsibly funds correctional supervision across Minnesota to better meet the needs of the 88,000 individuals subject to community supervision, be it probation, parole, or supervised release.

In particular, I am grateful that the bill includes the following:

- Includes the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRRA) to require personalized assessments and rehabilitation plans and the opportunity for earned incentive release and supervision abatement after meaningful engagement is demonstrated. It allows for the savings from program success to be reinvested in victim support services, crime prevention and intervention, community-based gap service program, and with the state's general fund.
- Establishes a Clemency Review Board to expand the accessibility and availability of pardon application review to more Minnesotans.
- Funds correctional supervision to create a more equitable, professional probation and supervision system across the state, including funding for Tribal Governments to provide supervision to their members.

- Provides body-worn cameras for corrections officers to ensure safety and transparency on behalf of department staff and the incarcerated population.
- Substantially increases the DOC's capacity to provide transformational education to those who are incarcerated - a key to rehabilitation, job attainment, personal transformation, and increased public safety.
- Invests in housing stability programs for those who are reentering our communities after serving time in prison, reducing the rate of homelessness in Minnesota.
- Expands 24-hour nursing to all DOC facilities to provide mandated healthcare to those who are under the care of the state while in prison.
- Significantly reduces or eliminates the cost of phone calls to and from those who are incarcerated.
- Meaningfully invests in community sex offender treatment - the first significant increase since 2007.
- Creates an Indeterminate Sentence Review Board, a five-member board to replace sole discretion by the commissioner of corrections on parole decisions.

The investments above will allow the DOC to create more successful public safety outcomes, and I am grateful for their inclusion in your bill. As the budget process moves forward, the DOC hopes to work further with you and your colleagues on other critical investments in the Governor's budget recommendation, including:

- Full funding for the Statewide Public Safety Data Infrastructure to replace the critically antiquated DOC records management and sentence administration system with a modern and secure data management and analysis system that also creates a statewide hub of correctional supervision data to be shared across all counties and system partners.
- Funding the creation of a Family Support Unit at the DOC to provide capacity to more strategically and meaningfully strengthen family ties during incarceration, an evidence-based solution to reduce the risk of reoffending.
- Invest in recruitment, retention, and staff wellness to help address critical staffing shortages.
- Fully fund the department's requests related to the Constitutionally required provision of health care, including dental care equipment and supplies, establishing a Disease Management Unit, telemedicine investments, and a nursing home care study.
- Funding to ensure virtual court hearings proceed effectively and efficiently in coordination with the Judicial Branch, a process that has grown exponentially in recent years without a corresponding increase in DOC staff and technology capacity.
- Invest in increased classroom space, education technology and partnerships around ensuring the state is able to take full advantage of Pell Grants newly available to incarcerated students.

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- Invest in creating an Evidence Based Practices Unit at the DOC to help ensure data-driven, solution-focused policies, training, and processes are applied in the department's work and in supervision practices across the state.
- Fully fund the DOC's requests related to the safety, security, and operations of the state's prison facilities, in particular ensuring food services has sufficient staffing, and the DOC can implement enhanced security around incoming mail processing and distribution.
- Invest in the DOC's efforts to increase accountability and transparency in state corrections, namely, to ensure sufficient Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion staff, policy review and research capacity, and the department's Internal Controls and Risk Assessment Unit.
- Create new pathways from prison to employment by establishing an Economic Opportunity and Public Safety Unit and invest in the DOC's EMPLOY program to link training, education, and industry in prisons to job placements upon release.

Again, thank you for your leadership investing in Minnesota's corrections system. As you know, community safety is only possible when our communities, the state, and each of us work together to offer opportunities, hold people accountable, deliver justice, and meet the needs of all Minnesotans. A comprehensive and systemic response to crime is critical. When over 95% of those in Minnesota's prisons return to communities across Minnesota, our collective safety depends upon their success.

Thank you for all your work this session. While much work remains before the close of the session, the efforts of the public safety committee and the budget bill you are bringing forward is something to be proud of. Minnesota deserves it and we look forward to partnering with you between now and the end of the session.

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