



Commissioner's Office

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April 5, 2022

The Honorable Julie Rosen
Senate Finance Committee
2113 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Rosen and Members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of the Department of Corrections on Senate File 2673. As we are all aware, the stakes are high for ensuring public safety for all Minnesotans, particularly with the increase in crime over the past two years. We share the goal of creating a safer state, now and always. The opportunity to invest in what works - in evidence-based, proven policies – is more critical than ever.

Community safety is only possible when our communities, the state, and each of us work together to offer opportunity, hold people accountable, deliver justice, and meet the needs of all Minnesotans. A comprehensive response to crime is critical because, as you know, over 95% of those who are in our prisons are going to return home to our communities. Our safety depends on their successful reintegration into our society.

However, instead of investing in strategies that work to rehabilitate those who are incarcerated, Senate File 2673 is heavily focused on simply adding more time to sentences and removing discretion from the experts in our communities who are elected and appointed to keep our communities safe. The bill spends hundreds of millions of dollars on similar policies that have failed in the past – relying on more incarceration and little use of data in public safety policy making.

If we are to address the repeat offending and the increase in violent crime, we must instead commit ourselves to the reality that the work doesn't end by simply arresting someone and sending them to prison to sit, isolated from the community. The purpose of prisons cannot be only to punish. It must be to rehabilitate individuals who will come back to their communities, to use tools and practices that work so there are no more victims in the future.

The budget request from the Department of Corrections has been thoughtfully developed with the ultimate goal of creating safer communities and reducing crime in Minnesota, while holding those who commit crime accountable. Our proposal is an effective approach both in the immediate term, and also over the course of the years to come. Because the Senate Judiciary Committee has not provided an opportunity for the department to present the requests found in the Governor's budget bill, [Senate File 4039](#), as well as in several stand-alone bills and in the revised budget announced on March 17, below are the requested investments for your consideration for inclusion in Senate File 2673.

- **Creation of a Statewide Public Safety Data Infrastructure:** *\$12M in FY23 and \$35M in FY24/25*
The Minnesota DOC and our systems across the state are incredibly data-rich with public safety data

points, but unfortunately, we are simultaneously information poor. The investment is also found in [Senate File 3976](#). It would accomplish two significant goals:

1. Replaces critically antiquated DOC systems with data-driven service delivery. The needed upgrades are critical to responding to the 2020 Office of the Legislative Auditor Report on Safety of State Correctional Facilities by targeting updates to more efficient, responsive, transparent data management systems.
2. Create a statewide hub of correctional supervision data for all counties and partners. Approximately 100,000 individuals are on supervision across the state, yet Minnesota lacks a uniform, reliable public safety information-sharing hub for correctional supervision for all 87 counties, the Judicial Branch, law enforcement, and the DOC

Without this investment, the DOC is left with antiquated technology on safety and security, programming and treatment, and supervision, among many others. Often, the current platforms cannot be updated with modern tools and efficiencies, and many systems still use fax machines. This bill would provide the DOC with the funding it needs to bring its data information systems into this decade and connect all system partners with shared information to keep Minnesotans safe.

- **Fully Fund the County Supervision Request from MACCAC and MACPO and Includes County-Supported, Evidence-Based Policy Changes: \$22.5M in FY23 and \$62.6M in FY24/25**

The Governor's DOC budget request fully funds the recommendations put forward by the partnership with all 87 counties and the three delivery systems to more equitably fund the state's supervision systems and implement evidence-based practices. The changes create one formula for supervision investments across all counties, tribes, and the DOC and ensure effectiveness and equity across systems and across the state. Remarks made in the committee on Monday, March 28 indicated a misunderstanding of the oversight function of this recommendation. The policy and future formula adjustments will be developed by a statewide committee, not by the Department of Corrections. The legislature would also maintain oversight of the recommendations into the future.

- **Invests in Pathways from Prison to Employment: \$3M in FY23 and \$9M in FY24/25**

The proposal, also found in [Senate File 4074](#), would create a Public Safety and Economic Opportunity Unit to build pathways from training, education, and industry in prisons to job placements upon release. With workforce shortages and clear evidence on the benefit of successful re-entry outcomes focused on employment, this investment meets many needs that our communities are facing. In Minnesota, 25 percent of those released from our prisons are going out homeless. The unemployment rate for individuals who have been incarcerated is 27 percent. These numbers are unacceptable for public safety, and we must do more to invest in what works. The investment would also allow the DOC to greatly expand partnerships with higher-education institutions for degree-track classes and expand work release to allow community-based education to those who qualify.

- **Funds Body-Worn Cameras for Corrections Officers and ISR Agents: \$1.5M in FY23 and \$2M in FY24/25**

Following recommendations outlined in the 2019 Office of Legislative Auditor Report on Safety

in State Correctional Facilities, body-worn cameras will better ensure safety and transparency on behalf of department staff and the incarcerated population.

- **Creates a Family Support Unit and Invests in Meaningful Connections:** *\$1.78M in FY23 and \$3.56M in FY24/25*

The requested investment creates a Family Support Unit within the DOC to create connections for the family members of incarcerated individuals and develop and partner on evidence-based programming with community members and organizations. Because research has consistently shown that family ties during incarceration significantly reduce the risk of reoffending, the funding would also provide access to phone calls and video visits and enhance programming to create meaningful connections with families and children. Sustained family contact while incarcerated has shown to reduce recidivism by up to 56 percent.

- **Invests in the Development and Implementation of a Healing House Model of Transitional Housing:** *\$12M in FY23 and \$35M in FY24/25*

Also found in [Senate File 3864](#), the DOC requests a project manager to assist in the development of the Healing House. The Healing House is a model of supportive, transitional housing, conceptualized by individuals with lived expertise, and intended to be a space for justice-systems involved Native American women to begin their journey towards healing and housing stability. Temporary staff will build partnerships with the community, philanthropy, and connecting the project with resources within MHFA, DHS, and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office at DPS. The intention is to create a space where women can address their trauma with a specific focus on sexual and domestic violence victimization.

- **DOC Mental Health Unit Pilot Project with Counties:** *Budget Neutral to the State*

The proposal, also found in [Senate File 4107](#), was developed in partnership with the Minnesota Sheriff's Association. The language creates a pilot project to provide treatment for individuals incarcerated in county jails who have serious and persistent mental illness in the DOC's Mental Health Unit. The proposal is cost neutral to the state as counties will reimburse expenses. A report and recommendations are due to legislature after 18 months.

- **Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act:** *Savings Anticipated*

The Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRRA), also found in [Senate File 2295](#) and was heard and passed off the House floor last year, would require the DOC to provide personalized assessments and rehabilitation plans for incarcerated people that, if meaningful engagement is shown, will result in earned incentivized release from confinement. Thirty-eight other states have similar earned release policies – because they are evidence-based to show lower risk of re-offense by those who participate. This outcome results in fewer repeat offenders and fewer future victims. Any savings to the state would then be reinvested equally in victim support services, crime prevention and intervention initiatives, community-based correctional programs, and the state's general fund.

- **Indeterminate Sentence Review Board:** *\$40,000 in FY23 and \$80,000 in FY24/25*

The request, also found in [Senate File 899](#), would create a five-member board to replace sole

decision making by the commissioner of corrections. Minnesota is only one of four states where these decisions are made by one person, rather than a panel of experts.

- **Project Management:** *\$230,000 in FY23 and \$460,000 in FY24/25*
The request is for two project managers to ensure a more strategic and collaborative approach across the agency. Studies have found that organizations that use proven project management practices waste 28 times less money than their counterparts who do not have project management practices in place.
- **Property Insurance Funding:** *\$650,000 in FY23 and \$1.3M in FY24/25*
Annual property insurance rates have increased by approximately 54 percent in FY2020 and have continued to increase significantly over the past two years. The DOC operates and maintains 11 state-owned correctional facilities across the state with a total of 336 buildings and has the responsibility to safeguard the state's assets.

The DOC appreciates that a portion of the needed supervision funding is included in Senate File 2673. We must continue working together to better support those who supervise the approximately 100,000 Minnesotans on supervision. However, I encourage you to work with the counties on including the broader agreed-upon language to resolve inequities that will persist in the system, regardless of whether additional funding is added on an ad-hoc basis.

The DOC also greatly appreciates the inclusion of [Senate File 2893](#), a provision that was developed by the DOC in coordination with the Minnesota Sheriff's Association and included in the department's budget request, which provides funding to reimburse counties for expenses incurred when transporting individuals to Minnesota in compliance with the Interstate Compact for Adult Supervision.

To truly hold people accountable and transform lives, we cannot simply be concerned with how much time people spend in prison or on supervision – we need to be concerned with how people spend that time and how supervision is provided upon release.

The DOC is committed to working together and investing in what works to keep Minnesotans safe. I appreciate your consideration of the proposals above and am available to provide more information upon request.

Sincerely,

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

Paul P. Schnell, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Corrections