

April 12, 2023

Senator John Marty  
Chair, Finance Committee  
Minnesota Senate  
3235 Minnesota Senate Building  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Marty:

On behalf of the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC), I am writing to express support for Senate File 2909, the omnibus public safety and judiciary budget bill. The bill makes historic investments in Minnesota's corrections system that will result in meaningful public safety for our state.

Through the leadership of Senator Ron Latz, the investments in Senate File 2909 recognize that public safety cannot be achieved through enforcement and prosecution only. Inclusion of the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRRA) creates a long-term, comprehensive, and evidence-based approach to preventing future crime by incentivizing rehabilitation and improving community reentry. Senate File 2909 also provides a range of tools and resources for community, local, and state government collaboration to provide effective accountability, support, and improve outcomes.

Senate File 2909 provides the DOC with critically needed base funding, while investing in person-centered and proven transformational services to ensure successful community reintegration. Additionally, the bill provides a framework for responsibly funding correctional supervision across Minnesota to better meet the needs of the 88,000 individuals subject to probation, parole, or supervised release supervision.

In particular, I am grateful that the bill:

- Includes the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRRA) which requires personalized assessments and rehabilitation plans for incarcerated individuals, along with the opportunity for earned incentivized release and supervision abatement after the individual meaningfully engages in rehabilitative programming and demonstrates changes in criminal thinking and identity. The MRRRA reinvests the money saved from program success into victim support services, community supervision related intervention services, crime prevention programs, as well as returns 25% to the general fund.
- Establishes a Clemency Review Board to expand the accessibility and availability of pardon application review to more Minnesotans.
- Funds Minnesota's correctional supervision delivery systems to address historic inequities and establishes a uniform formula for the state's probation and supervision system, including funding for Tribal Governments to better support or provide supervision to their members.
- Invests in a 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 creates a statewide hub of correctional supervision data to be shared across all counties and public safety system partners.

- Transforms the DOC's capacity to provide secondary and post-secondary education to those who are incarcerated through investments in staffing, classroom space, and technology to ensure the state can take full advantage of federal Pell Grants newly available to incarcerated students. Education is a proven evidence-based intervention that improves job attainment and retention and reduces the risk of reoffending.
- 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, fully funds requests related to dental care equipment and supplies, establishes a Disease Management Unit, invests in telemedicine, and provides for a nursing home care study.
- Invests in recruitment, retention, and staff wellness to help address critical staffing shortages.
- Funds the creation of a Family Support Unit at the DOC to strengthen family ties effectively and meaningfully during incarceration, an evidence-based solution proven to reduce the risk of recidivism.
- Ensures that virtual District Court hearings are processed in an efficient manner in coordination with the Judicial Branch. This process has forced the DOC to meet new demands without a corresponding investment in DOC staff and technology.
- Significantly reduces or eliminates the cost of phone calls to and from those who are incarcerated.
- Meaningfully invests in community-based 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 for those serving life sentences.
- Creates an Evidence Based Practices Unit at the DOC to ensure that data-driven, solution-focused policies, training, and processes are applied in the department's work and in supervision practices across the state.
- Fully funds the DOC's requests related to the safety, security, and operations of the state's prison facilities, in particular ensuring food services are sufficiently staffed, and the DOC can implement enhanced narcotics detection focused on incoming mail.
- Invests 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.

- Creates 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.

While the investments detailed above will allow the DOC to create more successful public safety outcomes, as the budget process moves forward, the DOC hopes to work further with conferees on other critical investments in the Governor's budget recommendation that were included in the House companion bill, including:

- Investing in body-worn cameras for corrections officers and intensive supervised release agents to improve staff safety and transparency in Minnesota's corrections system.
- Funding to ensure the Minnesota DOC fully complies with the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) to avoid losing federal funding.
- Expanding the DOC's Fugitive Apprehension Unit to help reduce the backlog of outstanding warrants and keep the public safe.

I sincerely appreciate the work and leadership of Senator Latz and members of the Judiciary Committee. The investments in Minnesota's corrections system in Senate File 2909 will create a more comprehensive and systemic response to crime at this critical time. When over 95% of those in Minnesota's prisons return to communities across Minnesota, our collective safety depends upon their success. Public safety is only possible when we work together as a state to offer opportunities, hold people accountable, deliver justice, and meet the needs of all Minnesotans.

Thank you for your work this session and consideration of the bill. We look forward to partnering with members on this committee 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

Cc: Members of the Finance Committee  
Senator Ron Latz