



January 20, 2023

Members of the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing to encourage you to confirm Paul Schnell as the Commissioner of Corrections. For the last four years we have been pleased to work with a responsive and empathetic corrections commissioner. Commissioner Schnell has continually partnered with us to pass and implement policies to improve the lives of incarcerated people with mental illnesses.

In 2019, we worked with Commissioner Schnell to pass bipartisan legislation to shine a light on the use of solitary confinement in Minnesota prisons, and take steps to mitigate the harm of punitive isolation. Additionally in 2019, the Commissioner advocated with us to reopen the Office of Ombuds for Corrections to prioritize the voice of incarcerated people and their families. In 2021, we worked together to pass the Hardel Sherrell Act to increase accountability and make long-overdue changes to the way we care for people with mental illnesses in our county jails. We were proud to support the Healthy Start Act to get pregnant people out of prison and protect the essential early bonding between parents and children.

Under Commissioner Schnell's leadership the Department of Corrections has taken significant steps to change the way we look at and treat incarcerated people. From initiating a department-wide person-centered approach to ensuring free phone and video calls for prisoners during the COVID-19 pandemic, Commissioner Schnell has maintained his vision through some very difficult times. If you have been around the legislature for any of the past four years you have likely heard the Commissioner name the statistic that over 90% of the people incarcerated in Minnesota will return to their communities. We are grateful for that vision which recognizes that incarcerated people had lives, families, and connections before they entered the prison system, and they will return to those communities after their sentence. We are grateful for the vision that recognizes that without wellness there can be no safety.

Again, we urge you to confirm Paul Schnell to continue his tenure as the Commissioner of Corrections. We appreciate your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Sue", written in a cursive style.

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Elliot Butay", written in a cursive style.

Elliot Butay
Senior Policy Coordinator



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