



March 19, 2023

Dear Chair Latz, Leader Limmer, and Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee members,

My name is Chris Mitchell, and I am a Captain working for the Department of Corrections (DOC). I am based out of the facility in Faribault, and I am coming up on 20 years of service with the DOC. I am writing today to urge your support of the DOC's statewide public data infrastructure budget request.

The staff responsible for some of the hardest work in state government are struggling with antiquated technologies. We are still currently using fax machines to make notifications, not just within the DOC but also to notify the public and other law enforcement agencies of important intelligence and even for escape. I know I do not have to go into detail about how time-consuming and inefficient fax machines can be. If you think about any time there is a medium or large-scale event, we are losing precious time using a fax machine to get information out. The delay can impact the safety and security of our communities.

When it comes to base technology, we are very outdated when it comes to the systems that we use to identify where the problems are in our facilities. We know there are systems available we could be using to track and identify dangerous groups, times, and areas in our prisons in real-time, but we have never had the funding to purchase them. This technology would help us get ahead of the curve and allow us to address a problem at the lowest level, rather than after it is too late. The process that we currently have in place is 100% manual, done by hand on paper, and has been in place since I started almost two decades ago. Minnesota is long overdue to invest in these tracking systems to help us with efficiency, safety, and security.

Another area where we definitely have not caught up with technology is discipline report sharing. Right now, there is a major break in information sharing between corrections officers and outside agency staff. Our systems do not communicate, and records are not shared. If there is a history of assaults on staff in the facility and the community supervision staff is not aware of it, it poses a threat to the safety of that staff person.

In corrections, we take our jobs very seriously. We share a common goal: to transform lives for a safer Minnesota. We can see solutions to our problems, but we do not have the funding to address them. I ask the committee to keep the Department of Corrections as a top budget priority. We can get people inside the help they need so that when they leave, they can be productive members of the community, but we need state support to do it.

Sincerely,

Chris Mitchell
Captain – MCF-Faribault