

Department of Corrections: Committed to safety of youth in custody

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Contact:

[608-240-5060](tel:608-240-5060)

DOCMedia@wisconsin.gov

MADISON—Department of Corrections (DOC) Secretary Jon Litscher penned a guest column which appeared in the [Wausau Daily Herald](#) outlining DOC's commitment to the safety and success of youth at Copper Lake School/Lincoln Hills School. The column is included below:

"I care deeply about the safety and well-being of every youth at Copper Lake School/Lincoln Hills School and Department of Corrections employee at all of our work sites throughout Wisconsin. I make it a point to spend a significant portion of my time in the field visiting with staff and those in our custody. As part of this effort, I have visited CLS/LHS six times during my tenure.

When I became DOC secretary in early 2016, my charge was clear: fix the concerns that had been raised regarding Copper Lake School/Lincoln Hills School as a result of DOC's internal investigation that began in November 2014. Through that process, DOC held staff responsible for misconduct and made widespread changes to division and institution operations.

These changes made have resulted in many positive improvements to institution operations. Staff today receive significant training, are required to wear body cameras when interacting with youth, and extensively document their involvement in use-of-force incidents.

These changes include the requirement to resolve situations with the least amount of force necessary and to use verbal dialogue whenever possible. This typically includes avoiding the use of physical force unless it is necessary for the safety of youth or staff. Agency, division and institution leaders hold weekly reviews of every youth injury and use-of-force incident to ensure accountability in institution operations. Leadership at every level are identifying and promptly addressing issues as they arise.

Having said this, we will not rest until we have comprehensively overhauled the Division of Juvenile Corrections and completed a full review of all institution policies and procedures. DOC is working closely with the Council of Juvenile Corrections Administrators and other organizations, as are a number of juvenile corrections agencies around the country, to actively minimize the use of confinement, restraints and chemical agents in juvenile correctional facilities, along with other enhancements that will positively benefit youth in our custody.

In June 2015, CJCA released a toolkit articulating a path to minimize the use of confinement, which CLS/LHS has been utilizing in an effort to reduce the frequency and length of confinement placements for youth. In late 2016, the Division of Juvenile Corrections established a road map which identifies a number of proposed strategic changes, which include changes to further minimize or eliminate the use of confinement, restraints and chemical agents.

Last year, after I became aware of a medication error that occurred at CLS/LHS, I directed the Division of Juvenile Corrections to correct the issue. As a result, licensed medical staff administer medication to youth, a change that took effect in November 2016. We made this change because we knew it was the right thing to do. DOC will continue to move forward in other areas to address concerns and enhance facility operations.

We are committed to making the changes necessary to ensure that Copper Lake School/Lincoln Hills School is a safe and secure environment for all youth confined there. As I noted before, while we have moved forward in many areas, we will continue to identify and make additional enhancements that positively affect the safety, security and well-being of youth in our custody.”