

# Senate approves requiring juvenile correctional officers to report suspected child abuse

Posted on Tuesday, Mar 7, 2017

The state Senate voted today to add juvenile correctional officers to the list of professionals who must report suspected child abuse even as Dems said it was an inadequate step to address problems at youth prisons in northern Wisconsin.

SB 35, approved via voice vote, was proposed following reports of mistreatment of juvenile offenders at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake. It requires juvenile correctional officers to report suspicions of child abuse they see in their professional duties. Those who fail to do so would be subject to criminal penalties.

State Sen. Lena Taylor, D-Milwaukee, said it was only a first step and if “we want to do something, we must stop the abuse before it ever starts.”

Taylor, a fierce critic of the juvenile justice system, said lawmakers must address the over-incarceration of juveniles, provide better access to opportunities for young people and end the practice of solitary confinement for juveniles, among other things.

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She also said many who end up in youth prisons have been failed by the state’s foster system and lawmakers need to take responsibility for failing to provide those kids services they needed.

“It’s sad that we’re not doing something to address the real issues at hand and the pipeline we have to prison for our youth, especially in Milwaukee,” she said.