

Department of Corrections: Reaches settlement regarding November 2015 incident at Copper Lake School

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MADISON – Wisconsin Department of Corrections Secretary Jon Litscher provided the following statement regarding a settlement that was reached with former youth Sydni Briggs, who was housed at Copper Lake School:

“I took over as Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections in early March 2016 with a clear mandate from Governor Walker to make aggressive and widespread changes; it was clear that the Governor wanted us to act decisively, make needed reforms, and hold ourselves accountable.

Outside counsel retained in connection with this case conducted a review of the Department’s actions. During this review, information was brought to the attention of current leaders regarding the November 2015 incident which prompted us to question whether the Department’s initial response was in line with existing policies. It became clear a proper investigation was not conducted at the time this tragic incident occurred.

Further, this review raised questions as to whether employees responding to the incident followed policies, which resulted in our opening internal investigations for possible work rule violations as part of our efforts to maintain accountability. To date, these investigations have resulted in employee separations.

We have made dozens of changes to enhance CLS/LHS operations, including the

hiring of a Juvenile Mental Health Director and new CLS/LHS chief psychologist; revamping the provision of mental health services and adding more licensed mental health professionals; requiring a seven-week pre-service academy for all DJC security staff; requiring staff to wear body cameras and record interactions with youth; and conducting a centralized review of all youth injuries, regardless of cause, with Department, Division, and CLS/LHS leadership.

These changes have dramatically changed the culture and environment at CLS/LHS for the better. We remain devoted to continuing to identify and make changes that further increase safety and security for staff and youth at CLS/LHS and across the Department.”