Rep. Schraa: Keep our kids near home

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(Madison, WI) Representative Michael Schraa (R-Oshkosh) is working for bold reforms in youth justice. “Strong partnerships across party lines gave birth to this innovative approach which will ensure public safety, save taxpayer dollars, and provide better opportunities for youthful offenders to get their lives back on track.”

“There’s nothing more important to society as a whole, to families, and to individuals,” said Schraa. “Legislators from both houses and both sides of the aisle are working together to develop the ‘Wisconsin Model,’ our own approach to juvenile justice reform.”

Youth who are adjudicated as Serious Juvenile Offenders and youth who are waived into adult court will be under the supervision of the Department of Corrections, as they are now. However, other youthful offenders who will be in custody for over a year go to a Secure Residential Care Centers for Children and Youth (SRCCCY) in the county. These SRCCCYs will be a new model: secure to assure public safety but less like a jail and more like a group home.

“Today the committees heard inspiring testimony about the pioneering work done with youth in Racine and LaCrosse. It is essential to foster the expansion of those kinds of programs across the state. “

Not every county needs an entire SRCCCY, so counties may work together or contract with another county to serve their youth. The state is offering grants to cover 95% of construction costs. The state is allowing more flexibility with youth

aids to cover operational costs. A committee will study and make recommendations on the best programming and facilities to serve our youth.

The hardest thing about the proposal is the timeline. If Lincoln Hills is closing in July 2020, the SRCCCYs will have to be in place by then. “It won’t be easy, and it won’t be cheap, but nothing worthwhile ever is.”

Today’s hearing ended on a high note, with a professor who noted that this was the best piece of legislation he had seen in his 35 years of work in justice and corrections reforms.