

Reps. Bowen and Kleefisch: Kleefisch-Bowen bill lays foundation for youth corrections overhaul

Posted on Tuesday, Feb 13, 2018

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MADISON – This morning, a bipartisan coalition of legislators announced Assembly legislation that would close Lincoln Hills by 2020, instead opening county-run secure residential care centers for less serious youth offenders while keeping Serious Juvenile Offenders (SJOs) under the supervision of the state Department of Corrections (DOC).

“Today’s announcement is the culmination of over a year of discussions with legislators on both sides of the aisle, judges, system stakeholders and advocates as I have made the reform of our youth corrections system a key focus of my work as a legislator,” said Rep. David Bowen (D-Milwaukee). “Providing evidenced-based, secure local options for judges was our goal, and this bill uses an existing, but unused, option to accomplish that goal. Allowing counties to run local, secure residential care centers focused on trauma-informed care with a low number of beds and low staff to student ratios will transform how we treat young people and deliver improved outcomes in addition to cost savings.”

Assembly Bill 794 (AB 794), the legislation that much of today’s announcement was built upon, would allow counties to collaborate or work alone in establishing secure residential care centers, moving less serious offenders into community-based treatment centers with a proven track record of reducing recidivism.

“Protecting our families is the most important goal,” said Representative Joel Kleefisch. “For those less serious offenders, it’s in our state’s best interest economically and ethically to ‘not throw away the key’ when it comes to arming those kids with the tools to become productive members of society.”

A public hearing on the agreed upon bill will be held this Thursday at 9 a.m. in the Assembly Committee on Corrections.